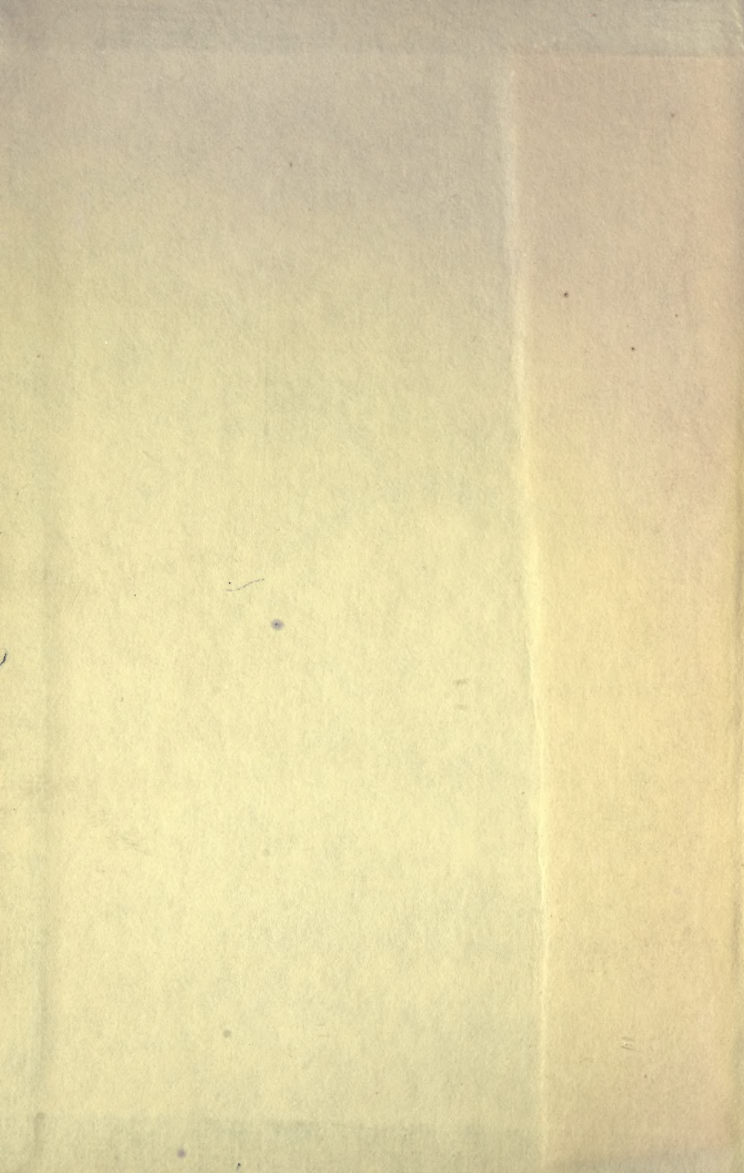
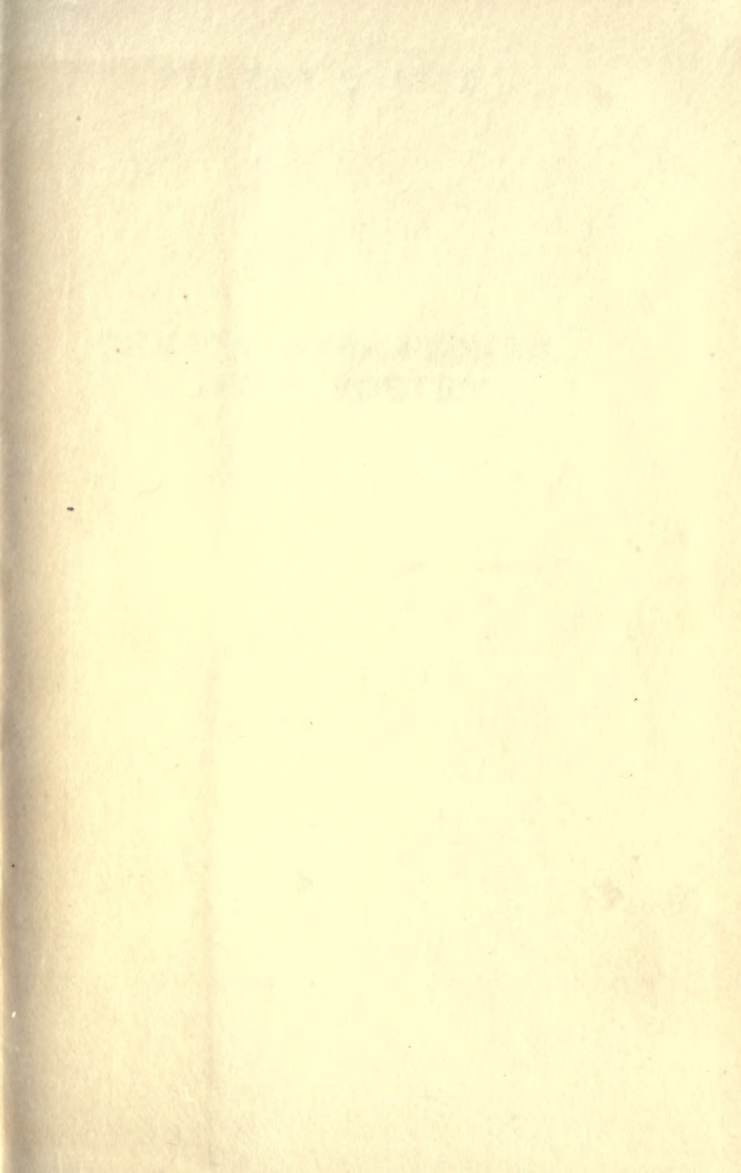


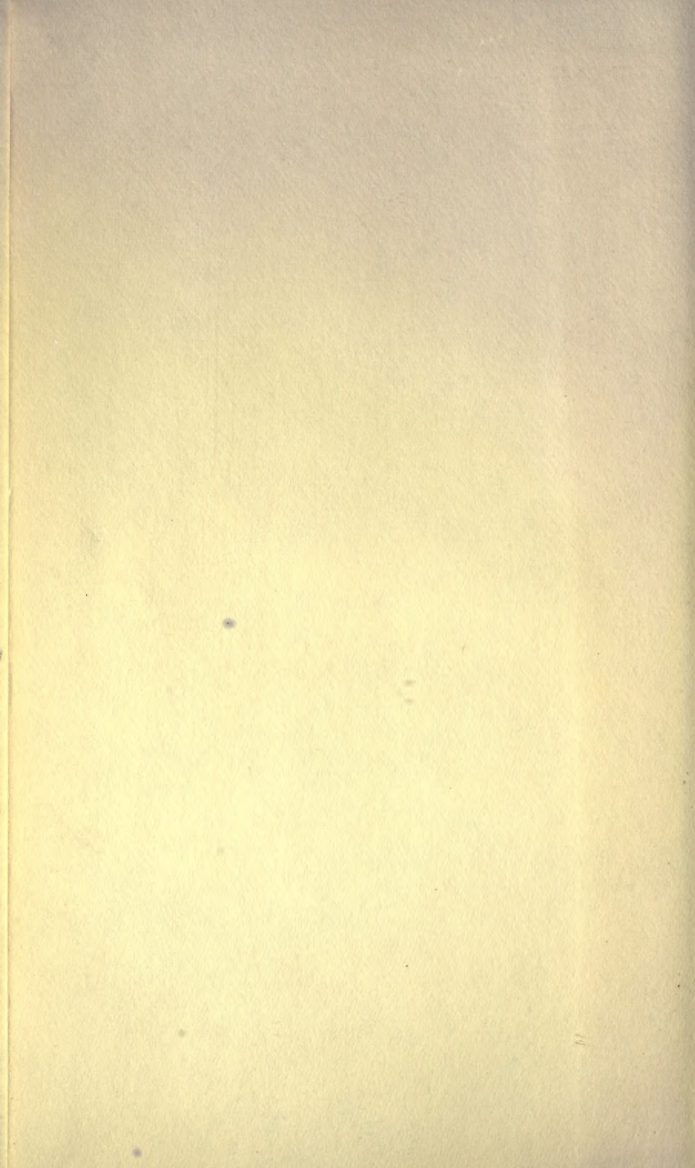


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POETRY & LIFE

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& THEIR POETRY

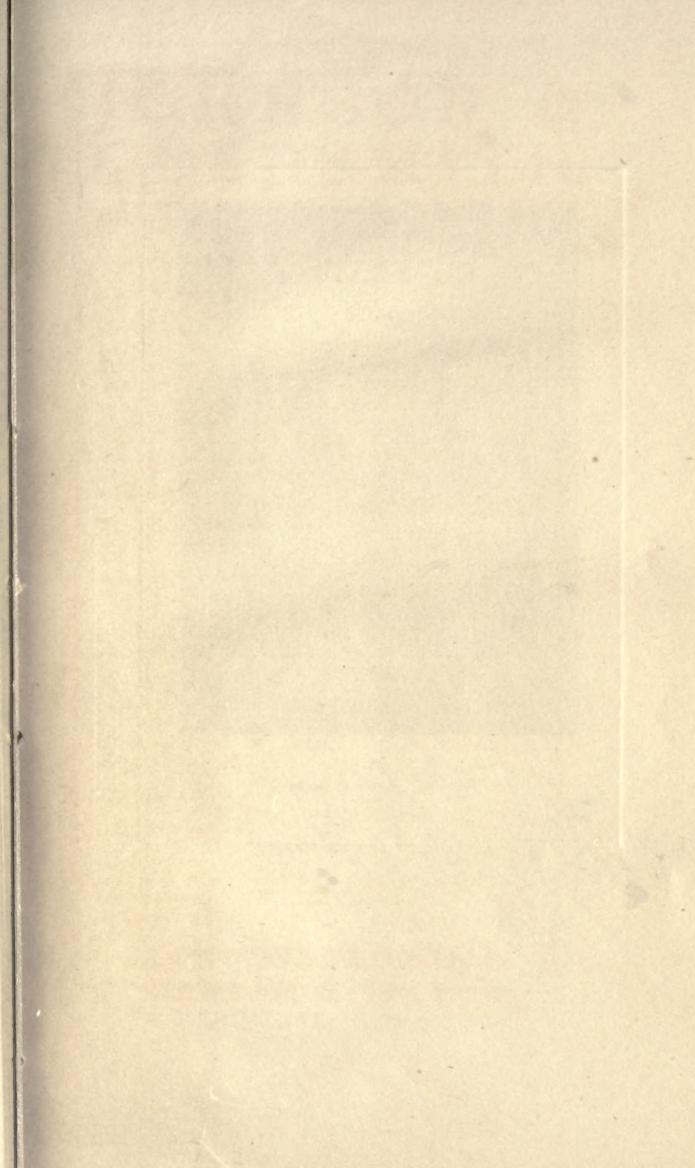
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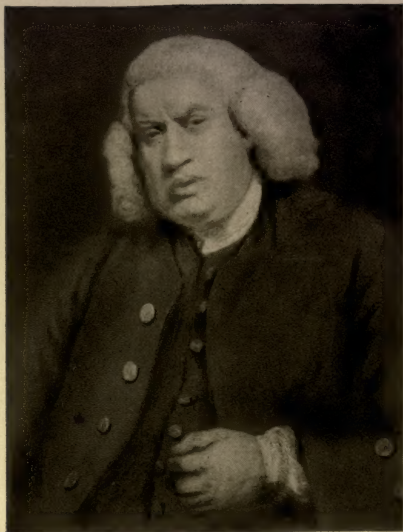
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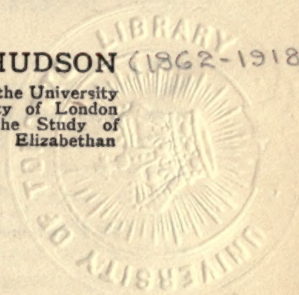
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JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH & THEIR POETRY

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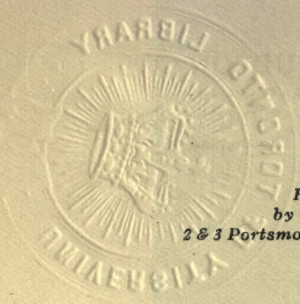
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JOHN SMITH
GOLD SMITH
& THEIR POTTERY



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GENERAL PREFACE

A GLANCE through the pages of this little book will suffice to disclose the general plan of the series of which it forms a part. Only a few words of explanation, therefore, will be necessary.

The point of departure is the undeniable fact that with the vast majority of young students of literature a living interest in the work of any poet can best be aroused, and an intelligent appreciation of it secured, when it is immediately associated with the character and career of the poet himself. The cases are indeed few and far between in which much fresh light will not be thrown upon a poem by some knowledge of the personality of the writer, while it will often be found that the most direct—perhaps even the only—way to the heart of its meaning lies through a consideration of the circumstances in which it had its birth. The purely æsthetic critic may possibly object that a poem should be regarded simply as a self-contained and detached piece of art, having no personal affiliations or bearings. Of the validity of this as an abstract principle nothing need now be said. The fact remains that, in the earlier stages of study at any rate, poetry is most valued and loved when it is made to seem most human and vital; and the human and vital interest of poetry can be most surely brought home to the reader by the biographical method of interpretation.

GENERAL PREFACE

This is to some extent recognized by writers of histories and text-books of literature, and by editors of selections from the works of our poets ; for place is always given by them to a certain amount of biographical material. But in the histories and text-books the biography of a given writer stands by itself, and his work has to be sought elsewhere, the student being left to make the connexion for himself ; while even in our current editions of selections there is little systematic attempt to link biography, step by step, with production.

This brings us at once to the chief purpose of the present series. In this, biography and production will be considered together and in intimate association. In other words, an endeavour will be made to interest the reader in the lives and personalities of the poets dealt with, and at the same time to use biography as an introduction and key to their writings.

Each volume will therefore contain the life-story of the poet who forms its subject. In this, attention will be specially directed to his personality as it expressed itself in his poetry, and to the influences and conditions which counted most as formative factors in the growth of his genius. This biographical study will be used as a setting for a selection, as large as space will permit, of his representative poems. Such poems, where possible, will be reproduced in full, and care will be taken to bring out their connexion with his character, his circumstances, and the movement of his mind. Then, in

GENERAL PREFACE

addition, so much more general literary criticism will be incorporated as may seem to be needed to supplement the biographical material, and to exhibit both the essential qualities and the historical importance of his work.

It is believed that the plan thus pursued is substantially in the nature of a new departure, and that the volumes of this series, constituting as they will an introduction to the study of some of our greatest poets, will be found useful to teachers and students of literature, and no less to the general lover of English poetry.

WILLIAM HENRY HUDSON



POEMS QUOTED IN WHOLE OR IN PART

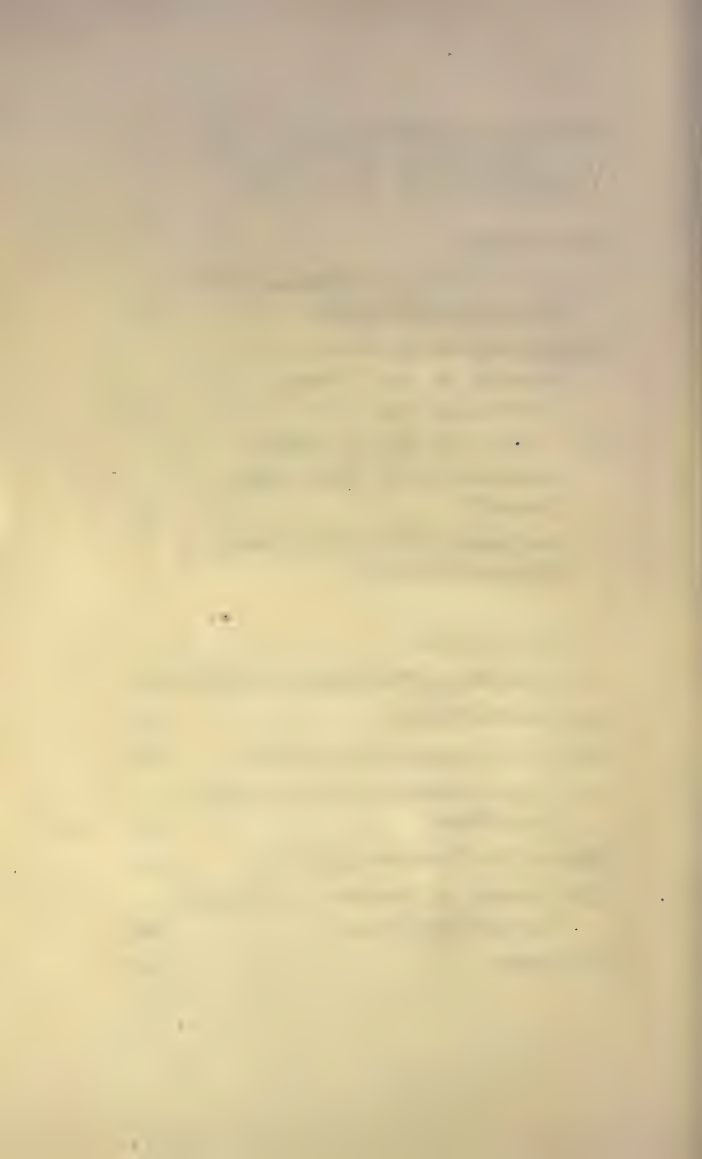
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JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH AND THEIR POETRY

FOR readers who care to explore the by-paths of literary history the old cathedral city of Lichfield is full of pleasant associations. There Addison was once a grammar-school boy; there at the age of eleven David Garrick first showed his quality as an actor; there for a time lived the eccentric Richard Lovell Edgeworth (Maria Edgeworth's father) and his even more eccentric friend, Thomas Day, the author of "Sandford and Merton"; there Erasmus Darwin, whom we now remember chiefly as the grandfather of the great biologist, practised medicine and solaced his leisure with verse; there the famous blue-stocking, Anna Seward, held her little court. Such memories as these, it is true, will appeal only to a few students here and there. But Lichfield has yet another and far more substantial claim to distinction as the birthplace of Samuel Johnson.

It was on September 18, 1709, in a house adjoining the Market-place, that the future lexicographer first saw the light. His father, Michael Johnson, was a Derbyshire man who had settled in Lichfield as a bookseller and stationer, and late in life married one Sarah Ford, by whom he had two children, the subject of these pages, and Nathaniel, who died in early manhood. This elder Johnson, Boswell tells

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us, was "a zealous high-churchman and royalist"—a fact of importance because it shows us whence Samuel derived his strong Tory bias. From his father he also inherited his robust and unwieldy frame, his great physical strength, and along with these, that morbid habit of mind, or "vile melancholy" as he called it, which was to cast a gloom over his whole life. His mother's influence counted principally, it would seem, in the early deepening of his religious nature.

Many stories have been collected about his childhood which illustrate his quick intelligence and remarkable power of memory; but such stories are told of most clever children and have no particular value. One incident must, however, be recorded which naturally left a lasting impression on his mind. When he was between two and three years old he was taken to London by his mother to be 'touched' for the scrofula by Queen Anne—the last of English monarchs to exercise this special royal prerogative; and late in life, as he told Mrs Piozzi, he retained "a confused, but somehow a sort of solemn, recollection" of the Queen as "a lady in diamonds, and a long black hood." Unfortunately, the touch of majesty had no effect; a point upon which Boswell at times ventured to rally him, with reference to his pronounced political principles, by suggesting that he should have been carried, not to Queen Anne, but to the exiled James Francis Edward, whom we know as the Old Pretender.

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The child was taught to read in a dame school, the mistress of which, years later, told him—it might have been flattery, but was probably sober truth—that he was the best scholar she ever had; and from her hands he presently passed into those of a certain Tom Brown, who, despite his humble lot in life, must have been a man of original and extensive views, since, according to Johnson's own statement, he once "published a spelling-book and dedicated it to the Universe." Thus prepared to begin what was then considered the one serious business of education—the study of Latin—he entered at eight the Lichfield Grammar School, and after two years under an usher named Hawkins, advanced to the charge of the headmaster, Mr Hunter, who, with some reputation as a scholar, was notorious even in those brutal days for his extreme and indiscriminate severity. To this petty tyrant, however, he afterward expressed his indebtedness. "My master whipped me very well," he told his friend Bennet Langton; "without that, Sir, I should have done nothing." The boy's ambition to excel in his studies was powerful enough to counteract that tendency to indolence which then, as throughout life, was the inevitable consequence of his sluggish temperament and persistent ill-health; but he took no part in the ordinary games of his schoolfellows, concerning which he once "pleasantly remarked" to Boswell that it was wonderful how successfully he "had contrived to be idle without

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them." At fifteen, on the advice of a cousin, the Rev. Mr Ford,¹ he was transferred from Lichfield to the Grammar School of Stourbridge, Worcestershire. There he remained twelve months, at the close of which he returned home, "where," says Boswell, "he may be said to have loitered for two years in a state very unworthy his unusual abilities." His time, however, was not as completely wasted as his father, who often scolded him for his idleness, supposed, for "he read a great deal in a desultory manner . . . as chance threw books in his way and inclination directed him through them." His father's bookshop, with its continually changing stock of volumes on all sorts of subjects collected for sale, provided him with ample material, and though then as always he was a capricious and impatient reader who rarely troubled himself to master a book in its entirety, but simply "tore the heart out of it," his insatiable curiosity, quickness of apprehension, and amazing memory combined to make him, not indeed an exact scholar, but a prodigy of miscellaneous learning. "Sir," he once said to Boswell, "in my early years I read very hard; it is a sad reflection but a true one that I knew almost as much at eighteen as I do now."

¹ This Ford was a man of talent but of very loose life, who is said to be the original of "the parson who sits next to the punch-bowl in Hogarth's 'Modern Midnight Conversation.'" (Mrs Piozzi's "Anecdotes of Johnson.") In his life of Fenton Johnson describes him as "a clergyman, at that time too well known, whose abilities, instead of furnishing convivial merriment to the voluptuous and dissolute, might have enabled him to excel among the virtuous and the wise."

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On October 31, 1728, Johnson, then in his twentieth year, entered as a commoner of Pembroke College, Oxford. In Boswell's judgment it was "very improbable" that "a man in Mr Michael Johnson's circumstances should think of sending his son to the expensive University of Oxford at his own charge," but as "the subject was too delicate to question Johnson upon" (such an instance of reticence on Boswell's part, by the way, is so rare as to call for special note) he was bound to leave it in doubt. It is supposed that the necessary financial assistance was offered by some friend of the family; perhaps by one of Samuel's old schoolfellows, a Shropshire gentleman named Corbet; perhaps by his godfather, Dr Swinfen, a physician of Lichfield. However this may be, the promise of help was, for some reason unknown, never redeemed, and as his father's business was at this time failing rapidly and his "scanty remittances" from home grew ever scantier and more uncertain, he was now, in his own words, "miserably poor." We shall presently come, in "The Vanity of Human Wishes," to a passage of great autobiographical interest in which, describing the misfortunes of the scholar, he draws upon his experiences in these dark days of struggle and depression. How extreme was his indigence is shown by the fact that he had at length to cease his visits to Christ Church, whither he had repaired for the sake of some special lectures which attracted him, because "his shoes were worn out and his

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feet appeared through them." What followed gives us a flash of insight into his rugged and independent nature. Some compassionate fellow-student, having noticed his distress, one day secretly placed a new pair of shoes at his door; but these "he threw away with indignation."

It is not surprising in the circumstances that his college career proved on the whole unsatisfactory; he paid little attention to the tasks prescribed in the curriculum, though in his characteristically erratic way he continued to devour with avidity all the books upon which he could lay his hand. His reputation was in general that of an idler. At the same time his abilities were beginning to be recognized. A translation which he made of Pope's "Messiah" into Latin verse obtained "great applause" in the University, and was even commended very warmly by the famous Mr Pope himself when he read it in a collection of miscellanies.

It was not, however, with poverty only that Johnson had to contend during this period. In the summer vacation of 1729 he suffered from a severe attack of that "horrible hypochondria" from which "he never afterward was perfectly relieved," and which, recurring at intervals throughout his life, often reduced him to a state of dejection bordering on despair. In this first onset of his dreadful malady he sought to overcome his mental gloom by violent physical exercise, but in vain; and in the end the clouds appear to have dispersed as

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suddenly and as mysteriously as they had gathered. Probably it was on account of this experience that his attention was turned in earnest to the subject of religion. Piously trained in his earliest childhood by his mother, he had, according to his own statement, lapsed in his ninth year into an indifference which by his fourteenth had developed into a kind of youthful infidelity. But at Oxford he read Law's "Serious Call to a Holy Life"; he found the book "quite an overmatch" for him; and from its perusal we may date his conversion. "From this time forward," says Boswell, "religion was the predominant object of his thoughts; though, with the just sentiments of a conscientious Christian, he lamented that his practice of its duties fell far short of what it ought to be." On this important question of Johnson's religion, however, we shall have more to say presently.

In December 1731 Michael Johnson died insolvent, and his son, who a few months before had been compelled through the complete failure of supplies from home to leave the University without a degree, was thrown entirely on his own resources. "I now therefore see," he wrote (in Latin) in his Diary, under date July 15, 1732, "that I must make my own future"; but the problem of how to set about making it was in the circumstances one of the utmost difficulty. Happily he had good friends at Lichfield—among them, Dr Swinfen, Captain Garrick, father of the actor,

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and Gilbert Walmesley, Registrar of the Ecclesiastical Court—who would not allow him to starve outright. Unprepared for any other profession, he naturally turned to teaching as a possible field, and for a few months acted as usher in a school at Market Bosworth, Leicestershire ; but he detested the drudgery, disagreed with the authorities, and, in general, suffered such “ complicated misery ” in his position that he was glad to resign it even under penalty of returning forthwith to idleness and poverty. After this failure he lived for a time in Birmingham, first as the guest of a friend named Hector, and then in lodgings of his own, and it was there that he executed his first literary commission—an abridged translation from the French of Lobo’s “ Voyage to Abyssinia ”—for which he received from the bookseller for whom he had undertaken it the handsome fee of five guineas. With such encouragement he now made other efforts to find hack-work which would at least support him, but these led to nothing. Even such disappointments, however, and the extreme uncertainty of his prospects did not deter him from taking what he well knew to be a “ very imprudent ” step—the step into matrimony. Among his new Birmingham acquaintances were a certain Mr Porter, a mercer, and his family ; Porter presently died ; and soon afterward, on July 9, 1735, his widow became Johnson’s wife. This marriage was always something of a puzzle to his friends and has remained one

AND THEIR POETRY

to his biographers, who have found it difficult to determine what measure of "connubial felicity" (as Boswell calls it) it brought respectively to the parties concerned. Certainly, on the face of it the union was singular and ill-advised. Johnson was then in his twenty-sixth year; his wife was nearly forty-eight. As a lover he had presented few attractions, for as Lucy Porter (his step-daughter) told Boswell, "when he was first introduced to her mother his appearance was very forbidding; he was then lean and lank, so that his immense structure of bones was hideously striking to the eye, and the scars of the scrofula were deeply visible," while "he often had, seemingly, convulsive starts and odd gesticulations, which tended to excite at once surprise and ridicule." On the other hand, the mature Elizabeth Porter was scarcely the woman, one would have supposed, to turn a young man's fancy to thoughts of love, for if we are to credit Garrick's description of her (Boswell himself is discreetly vague in regard to her personal appearance), she was extremely fat, "with swelled cheeks of a florid red, produced by thick painting and increased by the liberal use of cordials; flaring and fantastic in her dress, and affected both in her speech and her general behaviour."¹ However, Johnson's own emphatic declaration is on record that "it was a love marriage on both

¹ It is, however, only proper to add that Garrick was notoriously prone to exaggeration, and that, as Bishop Percy said, his descriptions must not be taken "too seriously."

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sides." Of his tenderness and devotion to his "Tetty," as he was accustomed to call her, there can indeed be no question, and as Boswell points out, "in his 'Prayers and Meditations' we find remarkable evidence that his regard and fondness for her never ceased, even after her death."¹

In one way his marriage was of immediate practical help to him, for Mrs Johnson brought him a sum of money which he at once proceeded to invest in the establishment of a private school where, as he advertised, "young gentlemen" would be "boarded and taught the Latin and Greek languages," at Edial, near Lichfield. But three pupils only—a boy named Offely, David Garrick and his brother George—appeared to take advantage of his tuition, and at the end of eighteen months, disheartened by his ill-success, he decided to abandon the experiment and to try his fortune in London. Accordingly on March 2, 1737, he and Garrick started together for that "great field of genius and exertion where talents of every kind have the fullest scope and the highest encouragement." Their departure was thus notified in a letter of introduction from Gilbert Walmesley to a friend of his, the Rev. John Colson :

He [Garrick] and another neighbour of mine, one Mr Samuel Johnson, set out this morning for London

¹ *E.g.*, under date March 28, 1753: "I kept this day as the anniversary of my Tetty's death, with prayer and tears in the morning. In the evening I prayed for her conditionally, if it were lawful." And again, under date March 28, 1754: "Almighty God, our heavenly Father, whose judgments terminate in mercy, grant I beseech Thee that the remembrance of my wife, whom Thou hast taken from me, may not load my soul with unprofitable sorrow."

AND THEIR POETRY

together. Davy Garrick is to be with you early the next week, and Mr Johnson to try his fate with a tragedy, and to see to get himself employed in some translation, either from the Latin or the French. Johnson is a very good scholar and poet, and I have great hopes will turn out a fine tragedy-writer. If it should any way lie in your way, I doubt not but you would be ready to recommend and assist your countryman.

The tragedy referred to was "Irene," only three acts of which, however, were at the moment complete. This was to be his passport to fame. Meanwhile, to meet his immediate needs, he had twopence halfpenny in his pocket.

II

IT is important to understand the condition of things in the literary world of London at the time when Johnson entered it, because this provides the background of so much of his own life.

In the early years of the eighteenth century men of letters had prospered greatly through their close connexion with ministers and wealthy patrons; most of them had been willing to sell their pens to one or other, and sometimes even to both, of the rival political parties; they had successfully cultivated the arts of flattery and intrigue; and gifts of money, comfortable pensions, well-paid offices and snug sinecures had been their reward. But these fat days came to an end with the advent

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of Sir Robert Walpole, who, like his royal masters, George I and George II, despised literature and its practitioners, though he was ready enough to pay cash down to journalists for support of his administration. With his accession to power the Government patronage of literature ceased, and before long patronage in general began to go out of fashion. The result was that anyone who wrote for a living now became entirely dependent upon the booksellers (as publishers were then called), whose position enabled them to exploit his needs. Hence the profession of authorship fell into disrepute, while the lot of the hack-writer was one of constant struggle and poverty, the hardships of which were commonly intensified—for the moral effect of such conditions was only too painfully apparent—by his own shiftlessness and dissipation.¹ A passage from Johnson's life of his Bohemian friend Richard Savage, who died in a debtor's prison in Bristol, may fittingly be cited in illustration:

He lodged as much by accident as he dined, and passed the night sometimes in mean houses which are set open at night to any casual wanderers, sometimes in cellars, among the riot and filth of the meanest and most profligate of the rabble; and sometimes, when he had not money enough to support even the expenses of such receptacles, walked about the streets till he was weary, and lay down in summer upon the bulk, or in the winter, with his associates in poverty, among the ashes of a glass-house.

¹ *Cp.* Goldsmith's "Inquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning," especially chap. viii.

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Another of Johnson's associates, a poetaster named Boyse, was once found by Johnson confined to his bed because his only clothes were in pawn, and though Johnson, who was then almost as impecunious as himself, contrived to collect enough money, by separate sixpences, to get them out, in two days they were pawned again and their owner once more a prisoner in his garret. The annals of Grub Street are full of similar details, and though, as in these particular instances, the man was himself the main cause of his misfortunes, this was, as our own subject shows, by no means always or necessarily the case. Johnson at least never sank into the mire of iniquity ; yet he tasted all the bitterness of the most extreme poverty ; he knew well what it was to wear shabby clothes and to go without a meal ; he and Savage sometimes tramped the streets all night for want of a few pence to pay for a bed ; once, as he told Sir Joshua Reynolds, they had thus spent a night together walking round St James's Square, though on this special occasion they had kept themselves in good spirits by inveighing against the Government.

Johnson's first lodging in London was in Exeter Street, Strand ; his first eating-house the " Pine-Apple," in New Street, near by, where he " dined very well " and in " very good company " for eightpence—sixpence for a cut of meat, a penny for bread, and a penny to the waiter. In the summer of that year he spent some time in Lichfield, where he finished his

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tragedy, and on his return to London in the autumn brought his wife with him. The rejection of "Irene" by the patentee of Drury Lane Theatre was a bad blow to his hopes. But he was now fortunate enough to obtain regular employment on Edward Cave's "Gentleman's Magazine," which, though ill-paid, provided him, Boswell surmises, with "a tolerable livelihood." To this, in particular, he contributed, from 1740 to 1743, the monthly reports of the proceedings of Parliament. It must be remembered that Parliamentary reporting, in our sense of the term, was not then permitted, and these so-called reports appeared as "Discussions in the Senate of Lilliput"; the Lords figuring as *Hurgoes*, the Commons as *Clinabs*, and the various speakers being thinly disguised under anagrams or other fanciful and easily deciphered pseudonyms. Johnson himself was never in either House; he merely worked upon the scanty notes brought to him by persons sent thither to collect material, who gained admission through Cave's interest with the door-keepers; and as he had thus a free hand to write up the debates, not as they had actually taken place, but in accordance with his own preconceived ideas, he was always careful, as he afterward confessed, "that the Whig dogs should not have the best of it."¹

¹ According to Murphy ("Essay on the Life and Genius of Dr Johnson"), the authorship of these debates, which was at the time a secret, was first acknowledged by Johnson himself at a dinner given some years later by Foote the actor. The company had been praising a speech by Pitt as equal to anything in Demosthenes. "That speech," said Johnson, to the amazement of all present, "I wrote in a garret in Exeter Street"; and he pro-

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It must be added, however, that the popular success of his work caused him to discontinue it, for "as soon as he found that the speeches were thought genuine he determined that he would write no more of them," while "such was the tenderness of his conscience that a short time before his death he expressed his regret for having been the author of fictions which had passed for realities."

Amid such labours undertaken "for gain, not glory," and "solely to obtain an honest support," he had meanwhile published, in May 1738, his first substantial work, "London: a Poem in Imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal." This he sold to Dodsley, who gave him ten guineas for the copyright. At that time of dominating classic taste the young poet, ambitious of fame, turned as naturally to satire of the Latin type as in the age of Elizabeth he would have turned to romantic drama, and the success of Pope's "Imitations of Horace" quite as naturally prompted him to further experiments on the same general lines. Pope, taking the kindly philosopher of the Sabine Farm as his model, had applied his "reflections" to "the use" of his "own country." Johnson does the same with the "reflections" of the other great Roman satirist, whose moral earnestness and *sæva indignatio* made his temper in many ways congenial to his own. Thus he does not translate the Third Satire,

ceeded to explain how it was done. It was the "lavish encomiums" bestowed upon him for his impartiality which called forth the highly characteristic remark quoted above.

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which in fact had already been admirably Englished by Dryden; he uses it as the framework for a series of independent studies of "the facts and persons" of modern metropolitan life.¹ The scheme of Juvenal's poem may be given in Dryden's succinct summary:

Umbricitus, the supposed friend of Juvenal, and himself a poet, is leaving Rome and retiring to Cumæ. Our author accompanies him out of town. Before they take leave of each other, Umbricitus tells his friend the reasons which oblige him to lead a private life in an obscure place. He complains that an honest man cannot get his bread at Rome; that none but flatterers make their fortunes there; that Grecians and other foreigners raise themselves by those sordid arts which he describes, and against which he bitterly inveighs. He reckons up the several inconveniences which arise from a city life, and the many dangers which attend it; upbraids the noblemen with covetousness, for not rewarding good poets; and arraigns the government for starving them.

This scheme Johnson follows in detail, merely substituting modern parallels for the special topics dealt with in his original; for his own starting-point is the departure for the country of his friend Thales for reasons precisely similar to those which had determined the voluntary exile of Umbricitus;² while in Thales' successive

¹ In France it had already been adapted by Boileau in his "*Adieux d'un Poète à la Ville de Paris*," and in England by John Oldham.

² Thales has been identified with Savage, whose departure from London, it is alleged, provided Johnson with the text of his poem. Savage, it is true, did not leave London till July 1739; but Murphy states that his plan of doing so had already been "finally established," and that it was this which "called to Johnson's mind the Third Satire of Juvenal." On the other hand, Boswell declares that Johnson "was not so much as

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attacks upon London, its corruptions, its dangers and its miseries, he simply reproduces and adapts those which Umbricius had directed against Imperial Rome.

Take, for example, the opening lines of Umbricius' discourse as they stand in Dryden's version :

Then thus Umbricius, with an angry frown,
And looking back on this degenerate town:—
Since noble arts in Rome have no support,
And ragged virtue not a friend at court,
No profit rises from the ungrateful stage,
My poverty increasing with my age ;
'Tis time to give my just disdain a vent,
And, cursing, leave so base a government.
Where Dædalus his borrowed wings laid by,¹
To that obscure retreat I choose to fly ;
While yet few furrows on my face are seen,
While I walk upright, and old age is green.
And Lachesis has somewhat left to spin.²
Now, now 'tis time to quit this cursed place,
And hide from villains my too honest face.
Here let Arturius live,³ and such as he ;
Such manners will with such a town agree.
Knaves, who in full assemblies have the knack
Of turning truth to lies, and white to black,
Can hire large houses, and oppress the poor
By farmed excise ; can cleanse the common shore

acquainted with Savage when he wrote his 'London.' " For a full discussion of this not very important question, see Dr Birkbeck Hill's edition of Boswell.

¹ "Dædalus, in his flight from Crete, alighted at Cumæ." (Dryden's note.)

² "Lachesis is one of the three Destinies, whose office was to spin the life of every man." (D.)

³ "Arturius means any debauched, wicked fellow, who gains by the times." (D.)

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And rent the fishery; can bear the dead
And teach their eyes dissembled tears to shed;
All this for gain; for gain they sell their very head. . . .
Why hire they not the town, not everything,
Since such as they have fortune in a string,
Who, for her pleasure, can her fools advance,
And toss them topmost on the wheel of chance?
What's Rome to me? what business have I there?
I who can neither lie, nor falsely swear!

Now compare with this passage Johnson's
paraphrase:

A transient calm the happy scenes bestow,
And for a moment lull the sense of woe.
At length, awaking with contemptuous frown,
Indignant Thales eyes the neighbouring town.¹
Since worth, he cries, in these degenerate days,
Wants e'en the cheap reward of empty praise;
In those cursed walls, devote to vice and gain,
Since unrewarded science toils in vain;
Since hope but soothes to double my distress,
And every moment leaves my little less;
While yet my steady step no staff sustains,
And life, still vigorous, revels in my veins,
Grant me, kind Heaven! to find some happier
place,
Where honesty and sense are no disgrace;
Some pleasing bank, where verdant osiers play,
Some peaceful vale, with Nature's paintings gay,
Where once the harass'd Briton found repose,
And, safe in poverty, defied his foes;
Some secret cell, ye Powers indulgent! give;
Let —— live here, for —— has learn'd to live.

¹ The scene of the supposed leave-taking is "Thames's bank" at Greenwich. Johnson was lodging at Greenwich at the time when the poem was written.

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Here let those reign whose passions can incite
To vote a patriot black, a courtier white;
Explain their country's dear-bought rights away,
And plead for pirates in the face of day;¹
With slavish tenets taint our poison'd youth,
And lend a lie the confidence of truth.
Let such raise palaces, and manors buy,
Collect a tax, or farm a lottery;
With warbling eunuchs fill our silenced stage,²
And lull to servitude a thoughtless age.
Heroes, proceed! what bounds your pride shall
hold?
What check restrain your thirst of power and
gold?
Behold rebellious virtue quite o'erthrown;
Behold our fame, our wealth, our lives your own!

Comparison of these two extracts will serve to illustrate Johnson's method of adapting (or, to use Boswell's word, "transfusing") Juvenal's material. Another example may, however, be given. The Roman satirist had made a spirited attack upon the Greek adventurers who swarmed in the great cosmopolitan capital of his own day. Johnson, who had a thoroughly John Bullish contempt for all foreigners, easily turned this to account in a similar attack upon the many French exiles then living in London and flourishing, as he chose to believe, by all sorts of chicanery and intrigue, at the expense of its native inhabitants,

¹ "The piracies of the Spaniards were openly defended in Parliament."
(Note by Gilfillan.)

² The reference is to the great contemporary popularity of Italian opera, which Johnson resented as a rival to the legitimate drama. The rejection of "Irene" naturally rankled in his mind.

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whom they demoralized in the process : hatred of the French, in particular, being one of his most deeply rooted prejudices. Here is a portion of the passage in Juvenal :

I haste to tell thee—nor shall shame oppose—
What confidents our wealthy Romans chose ;
And whom I must abhor : to speak my mind,
I hate, in Rome, a Grecian town to find ;
To see the scum of Greece transplanted here,
Received like gods, is what I cannot bear. . . .
Old Romulus, and Father Mars, look down !
Your herdsman primitive, your homely clown,
Is turned a beau in a loose tawdry gown.
His once unkem'd and horrid locks, behold,
'Stilling sweet oil ; his neck enchained with gold ;
Aping the foreigners in every dress,
Which, bought at greater cost, becomes him less.
Meantime they wisely leave their native land ;
From Sicyon, Samos, and from Alaband,
And Amydon, to Rome they swarm in shoals :
So sweet and easy is the gain from fools.
Poor refugees at first, they purchase here ;
And, soon as denized, they domineer ;
Grow to the great, a flattering, servile rout,
Work themselves inward, and their patrons out.
Quick-witted, brazen-faced, with fluent tongues,
Patient of labours, and dissembling wrongs. . . .
All things the hungry Greek exactly knows,
And bid him go to heaven, to heaven he goes.

This passage is thus utilized by Johnson for his own round abuse of the French ; and, as will be seen, it loses nothing of its strength in the paraphrase :

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The cheated nation's happy favourites see !
Mark whom the great caress, who frown on me !
London, the needy villain's general home,
The common sewer of Paris and of Rome,
With eager thirst, by folly or by fate,
Sucks in the dregs of each corrupted State.
Forgive my transports on a theme like this—
I cannot bear a French metropolis.
Illustrious Edward ! from the realms of day,
The land of heroes and of saints survey ;
Nor hope the British lineaments to trace,
The rustic grandeur, or the surly grace ;
But lost in thoughtless ease and empty show,
Behold the warrior dwindled to a beau ;
Sense, freedom, piety refin'd away,
Of France the mimic, and of Spain the prey !
All that at home no more can beg or steal,
Or like a gibbet better than a wheel ;
Hiss'd from the stage, or hooted from the court,
Their air, their dress, their politics import ;
Obsequious, artful, voluble, and gay,
On Britain's fond credulity they prey. . . .
All sciences a fasting Monsieur knows,
And bid him go to hell, to hell he goes.
Ah ! what avails it that, from slavery far,
I drew the breath of life in English air ;
Was early taught a Briton's right to prize,
And lisp the tale of Henry's victories ;
If the gull'd conqueror receives the chain,
And flattery prevails, where arms are vain ?
Studious to please, and ready to submit,
The supple Gaul was born a parasite ;
Still to his interest true where'er he goes,
Wit, bravery, worth, his lavish tongue bestows ;
In every face a thousand graces shine,

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From every tongue flows harmony divine.
These arts in vain our rugged natives try,
Strain out, with faltering diffidence, a lie,
And get a kick for awkward flattery.

The general quality of "London" as a whole—and it consists of only 263 lines—may be judged by these citations. As an exercise in the kind of poetry which Pope had made popular it has undeniable merits, for it is vigorous in thought, compact in style, and smooth in versification. But when we have said this much we have given it all the praise that is its due. Now that taste has long since changed and we care for the smallest measure of originality far more than for the most scholarly and ingenious remanipulations of classical themes, we find it indeed too artificial alike in matter and in form to make a strong appeal. Here and there, it is true, we catch the genuine personal accent, as particularly in the fine account of the evils of poverty, in which, as we can well understand, the writer drew upon his own bitter experience, and which, it should be noted, greatly amplifies the corresponding passage in Juvenal :

By numbers here from shame and censure free,
All crimes are safe, but hated poverty.
This, only this, the rigid law pursues,
This, only this, provokes the snarling Muse ;
The sober trader, at a tatter'd cloak
Wakes from his dream, and labours for a joke ;
With brisker air the silken courtiers gaze,

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And turns the various taunt a thousand ways.
Of all the griefs that harass the distress'd,
Sure the most bitter is a scornful jest ;
Fate never wounds more deep the generous heart,
Than when a blockhead's insult points the dart.
Has Heaven reserved, in pity to the poor,
No pathless waste or undiscovered shore ;
No secret island in the boundless main ;
No peaceful desert yet unclaim'd by Spain ?
Quick let me rise, the happy seats explore,
And bear Oppression's insolence no more.
This mournful truth is everywhere confess'd,
SLOW RISES WORTH, BY POVERTY DEPRESS'D ;
But here more slow, where all are slaves to gold,
Where looks are merchandise, and smiles are sold ;
Where, won by bribes, by flatteries implored,
The groom retails the favours of his lord.

These lines have the unmistakable ring of sincerity, but they serve only to throw the radical conventionality of their context into bolder relief. And in fact the central defect of the poem is its radical conventionality ; by which I mean not the conscious falsification of experience, but rather the unreality of feelings assumed because they are traditionally supposed to be the feelings appropriate to the occasion in question. Producing it in accordance with the set fashion of the time, Johnson merely repeated in it the stereotyped commonplaces of the moralists of all ages—commonplaces to which the Latin satirist whom he took as his model had given classical expression—regarding the evils of advancing civilization and the

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iniquities of great cities. But deeply as he suffered under the hardships of his own lot, and fierce as was his resentment against the conditions by which they were caused, he could have been only half in earnest in penning many of the sentiments which he placed on Thales' lips. At best they represent merely a temporary mood which was entirely out of harmony with his most characteristic habits of thought. His scorn of city life, for instance, is, as we well know, only simulated, for whatever its vices and its miseries a great city provided the environment which was indispensable to him and in which alone he felt at home. His praise of retirement and the moral value of solitude and nature is equally unconvincing, for he hated solitude, made fun of "pastoral simplicity," and was totally wanting in any æsthetic sense of natural beauty. Nor did he in the least believe that progress means increase of corruption or that the "good old times" were any better than those into which he had himself been born; on the contrary, despite his Toryism, he always held that the development of civilization is on the whole favourable to virtue as well as to happiness. The fundamentally conventional character of the poem is thus apparent.

This, however, was rather an attractive than a disturbing feature to Johnson's contemporaries, and "London" scored an immediate success. "Everybody was delighted with it"; it "got to a second edition in the

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course of a week ”; and Pope—the great Pope himself—prophesied that the new poet would “soon be *déterré*.”

III

UNFORTUNATELY, while his poem brought him fame, it did not help him to solve the practical problem of his life. Soon after its publication he received an offer of the headship of a provincial school at a salary of £60 a year, on condition that he should qualify himself with the degree of Master of Arts; but though several influential persons endeavoured to obtain for him such an honorary recognition, first from Oxford and then from Dublin, their applications failed and the proposal lapsed. As another possibility of emancipating himself from “the drudgery of authorship” he then thought of the law, but “here also the want of a degree was an insurmountable bar.” There was nothing left for him, therefore, but to settle down to his hack-work for the booksellers, and for nearly ten years this was the only source of his always small and often precarious income. An anecdote which has reached us by a rather circuitous route, but which none the less seems to be well authenticated, may be cited as an illustration of his “extreme indigence” during much of this period. One day in 1744 a certain Mr Walter Harte¹ dined with Cave,

¹ It appears that Harte himself told the story to a Mr Richard Stowe, who in turn communicated it to Boswell.

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and in the course of the meal praised the "Life of Savage," just then published. "Soon after, meeting him [Harte], Cave said: 'You made a man very happy t'other day.' 'How could that be?' says Harte; 'nobody was there but ourselves.' Cave answered by reminding him that a plate of victuals was sent behind a screen, which was to Johnson, dressed so shabbily that he did not choose to appear; but on hearing the conversation he was highly delighted with the encomiums on his book." Let it here be recorded to his credit that through all these years of struggle and disappointment he performed his tasks and bore his hardships with a steady courage which makes him one of the most heroic figures in the annals of our literature.

At length his fortunes began to improve. Miscellaneous and ephemeral as, for the most part, his labours had been, he had through them achieved by little and little a solid reputation for talents and scholarship, and in 1747 a syndicate of booksellers commissioned him to prepare for them a Dictionary of the English Language. He calculated that this immense enterprise—and he confessed himself "frighted at its extent"—would occupy him for three years. In fact, it took him eight years to complete it, and long before the last sheets had been sent to press the whole of the contract price of £1575 had been exhausted. Meanwhile, however, he had been enabled to make a change for the better in his domestic con-

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ditions. Hitherto he and his wife had lodged in alleys and courts in the neighbourhood of the Strand. He now rented a house in Gough Square, Fleet Street, in "an upper room" of which, "fitted up like a counting-house for the purpose," he kept his six amanuenses busy at their work. For the sake of his wife's health he also took lodgings in what was then the country village of Hampstead.

The same year that saw Johnson thus committed to his heavy task also marked an epoch in the career of David Garrick, who, having in the meantime established his position as the leading English actor of his day, now became joint patentee with James Lacy of the Drury Lane Theatre. At his request his friend and former tutor provided him with a Prologue for the opening night of his management. Mr Courthope describes Johnson as "the best writer of prologues in the language"; "no man," he says, "was ever so well qualified to strike that just mean between respectfulness and authority which such addresses to the public require"; and on reading the following lines we shall, I think, agree that they well exemplify his "sound critical judgment and elevated feeling." Garrick, it will be remembered, entered upon his management with the avowed intention of raising the tone of the stage, and in such an enterprise he knew that he could be certain of Johnson's support.

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PROLOGUE

SPOKEN BY MR GARRICK AT THE OPENING OF
THE THEATRE ROYAL, DRURY LANE, 1747

When Learning's triumph o'er her barbarous foes
First rear'd the stage, immortal Shakespeare
rose ;

Each change of many-coloured life he drew,
Exhausted worlds, and then imagined new.
Existence saw him spurn her bounded reign,
And panting Time toil'd after him in vain ;
His powerful strokes presiding Truth impress'd,
And unresisted Passion storm'd the breast.

Then Jonson came, instructed from the school,
To please in method, and invent by rule ;
His studious patience and laborious art
By regular approach essay'd the heart.
Cold Approbation gave the lingering bays,
For those who durst not censure, scarce could
praise ;

A mortal born, he met the general doom,
But left, like Egypt's kings, a lasting tomb.

The wits of Charles found easier ways to fame,
Nor wish'd for Jonson's art, or Shakespeare's
flame.

Themselves they studied ; as they felt, they writ ;
Intrigue was plot, obscenity was wit.

Vice always found a sympathetic friend ;
They pleased their age, and did not aim to mend.
Yet bards like these aspired to lasting praise,
And proudly hoped to pimp in future days.

Their cause was general, their supports were
strong ;

Their slaves were willing, and their reign was
long ;

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Till Shame regain'd the post that Sense betray'd,
And Virtue call'd Oblivion to her aid.

Then crush'd by rules, and weaken'd as refin'd,
For years the power of Tragedy declined ;
From bard to bard the frigid caution crept,
Till Declamation roar'd, whilst Passion slept.¹
Yet still did Virtue deign the stage to tread,
Philosophy remain'd though Nature fled.
But forced, at length, her ancient reign to quit,
She saw great Faustus lay the ghost of Wit ;
Exulting Folly hail'd the joyous day,
And Pantomime and Song confirm'd her sway.²

But who the coming changes can presage,
And mark the future periods of the Stage ?
Perhaps if skill could distant times explore,
New Behns,³ new Durfeys⁴ yet remain in store ;
Perhaps where Lear has raved and Hamlet died
On flying cars new sorcerers may ride ;
Perhaps (for who can guess the effects of
chance ?)

Here Hunt⁵ may box and Mahomet⁶ may dance.
Hard is his lot that, here by Fortune placed,
Must watch the wild vicissitudes of Taste ;
With every meteor of Caprice must play,
And chase the new-blown bubbles of the day.
Ah ! let not Censure term our fate, our choice,
The Stage but echoes back the public voice ;
The drama's laws the drama's patrons give,

¹ Johnson's own "Irene" falls under this censure ; it is written in strict accordance with the "rules"—that is, in the so-called Classical form ; it is full of frigid declamation ; and, as even Boswell is compelled to admit, it is entirely deficient "in that delicate power of touching the human feelings, which is the principal end of the drama."

² *Cp. ante*, p. 29, note 2.

³ Aphra Behn, a playwright and novelist of the Restoration, the licentiousness of whose writings made her notorious even in that profligate age.

⁴ Thomas D'Urfey (1653-1723), a third-rate dramatist.

⁵ A famous boxer of the time.

⁶ A rope-dancer and conjurer.

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For we that live to please must please to live.

Then prompt no more the follies you decry,
As tyrants doom their tools of guilt to die.

'Tis yours, this night, to bid the reign commence
Of rescued Nature and reviving Sense ;

To chase the charms of Sound, the pomp of Show,
For useful Mirth and salutary Woe ;

Bid scenic Virtue form the rising age,

And Truth diffuse her radiance from the Stage.

Garrick's position at Drury Lane gave him the opportunity of doing his old friend a good turn, and in 1749 he produced Johnson's tragedy. But though he threw himself into the performance "with a cordiality which became the friendship that he professed to its author,"¹ and though all the parts were well filled, the costumes "rich and magnificent," and the scenery "splendid and gay," "Irene" did not please the public. Thanks, however, to the support of "a number of judicious spectators" it ran for nine nights,² while Johnson's profits from royalties and the sale of the copyright amounted to nearly £300—a welcome addition to his exchequer. On the first night of the play he appeared in the unwonted splendour of "a scarlet waistcoat, with rich gold lace, and a gold-laced hat," which he had procured expressly for the momentous occasion. He took his failure with his customary fortitude ; when asked how he felt about it, he replied, "Like the Monument."

Happily he was able to find some compensa-

¹ Davies' "Life of Garrick," vol. i, p. 155. • ² *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 157.

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tion for the final collapse of his dramatic ambitions in the well-merited success of a poem which he had published a little earlier in the same year, "The Vanity of Human Wishes: in Imitation of the Tenth Satire of Juvenal." This really great work, which is not only the one lasting monument of his poetic fame, but is also entitled to rank among the finest didactic poems in our literature, must be given entire. Its power and nobility are such that it might safely be left to make its own impression. But a few introductory remarks may be useful as a help to its fuller appreciation from the critical point of view.

In the first place, like "London," it furnishes a practical illustration of Johnson's poetic principles. A thoroughgoing Tory, in literature as well as in politics, he held tenaciously to those narrow and jejune theories of poetry which, under Pope's supremacy, were flourishing almost unchallenged during his youth; his taste was fashioned upon and circumscribed by them; and even amid the changes which in his later years heralded the rise of new movements in literature, and of which I shall speak more fully presently, he remained a vigorous opponent of every innovation and a bigoted supporter of what is known as the Augustan tradition. Such being his critical creed, his own poetical work was naturally done in accordance with it, and "The Vanity of Human Wishes" belongs, like its forerunner, entirely to the earlier eighteenth

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century, or so-called Classic school: in matter, by its satiric and didactic quality; in versification, by its adherence to the Popean regular closed couplet.

Secondly, it was in compliance with the academic tendency which then dominated literature that in it, as in "London," he once more went directly back to a Latin source for his inspiration, and produced what was avowedly an adaptation of another of Juvenal's satires. But here the essential difference between his two poems has to be emphasized. In "London," as we have seen, he kept so close to the lines of his model that the result was little more than a modernized paraphrase. "The Vanity of Human Wishes," though still an imitation, is not merely an imitation; on the contrary, while he builds upon the foundation and with the materials provided by Juvenal, the actual structure is entirely his own. The explanation of this difference is simple. In the earlier poem he had dealt with a rather meagre subject which touched him at most only superficially, and with ideas which belonged rather to the stock-in-trade of the moralists than to his own view of life, and in writing it he had been mainly concerned as a scholar to exhibit his learning and skill. In this second poem of ten years later he develops a theme of broad and permanent human interest which was, moreover, so inextricably bound up with what was deepest and most vital in his thought that he could not fail to

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put himself into it. Hence, though he adopts the ground plan of Juvenal's satire, his use of his model is no longer, as it was in the case of "London," of any special interest to us. In fact, the details of the Latin poet's scheme are so freely treated by him, and every passage is so impregnated with his own feeling, that the work as a whole may be regarded as substantially original.

As such, therefore, it is particularly valuable as a compact statement of Johnson's philosophy of life—the philosophy elsewhere expounded by him in his essays, in many of the conversations reported by Boswell, and in greatest detail in "Rasselas." That his view of life was profoundly and consistently sad is of course very clear. *Vanitas vanitatum omnia vanitas*—the vanity not of human wishes only, but of everything human—was the burden of all his thought. Life is, on the whole, miserable; let us, as he said to Boswell, clear our minds of cant, and admit it. We must "endeavour to see things as they are";¹ it is of no use to delude ourselves by talking sentimental nonsense about them.² "Philosophers there are

¹ Letter to Bennet Langton, in Boswell, pp. 111, 112. (The page references to Boswell throughout signify the "Globe" edition.)

² Cp. his severe strictures upon Pope's "Essay on Man," the brilliant craftsmanship of which he admired, while its loose thinking and ridiculous optimism irritated him: "Having exalted himself into the chair of wisdom he tells us much that every man knows and much that he does not know himself. . . . This 'Essay' affords an egregious instance of the predominance of genius, the dazzling splendour of imagery, and the seductive power of eloquence. Never was penury of knowledge and vulgarity of sentiment so happily disguised." ("Life of Pope.") See also his crushing "Review of Soame Jenyns' 'Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil,'" in which Pope is again subjected to some very caustic criticism.

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who try to make themselves believe that this life is happy, but they believe it only while they are saying it, and never yet produced conviction to a single mind.”¹ “Human life is everywhere in a state in which much is to be endured and little to be enjoyed”;² we spend most of our time in shunning “fancied ills” and chasing “airy good”; and even when we realize our desires the inevitable result is either disappointment or satiety. The “vacuity of life” is a constantly recurring topic with him; we are pricked into activity by a sense of void and the necessity of doing something to occupy our minds; “such is the emptiness of human enjoyment that we are always impatient of the present,”³ and “none are happy but by the anticipation of change”;⁴ while any permanent amelioration in our lot is made impossible by “the innumerable casualties which lie in ambush on every side” to “intercept our happiness.”⁵ A broad survey of human experience serves only to reinforce the conclusions which each man may draw from his own; “When we take the most distant prospect of life, what does it present to us but a chaos of unhappiness, a confused and tumultuous scene of labour and contest, disappointment and defeat? If we view past ages in the reflection of history, what do they offer to our meditation but crimes and

¹ “Piozzi Letters,” vol. i, p. 150.

³ “Rambler,” No. 207.

⁵ “Rambler,” No. 205.

² “Rasselas,” chap. xi.

⁴ “Rasselas,” chap. xlvii.

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calamities? ”¹ Nor is the comfortable thesis of the moralists—that virtue is secure of its reward—by any means borne out by the facts: “Whether perfect happiness would be procured by perfect goodness . . . this world will never afford an opportunity of deciding. But this at least may be maintained, that we do not always find visible happiness in proportion to visible virtue. All natural and almost all political evils are incident alike to the bad and good. . . . All that virtue can afford is quietness of conscience, a steady prospect of a happier state; this may enable us to endure calamity with patience, but remember that patience must suppose pain.”²

Johnson, then, was a pessimist; but there are pessimists and pessimists, and it is important to understand the quality of his pessimism. On this subject two remarks may be made.

To begin with, there is nothing frivolous or querulous or ignoble about it. It was characterized by all the moral robustness of the man himself. He does not make a luxury of his sadness; he does not sentimentalize over it; above all, he does not whine. Too pious to rebel and too manly to complain, he faces the realities of life with stoical courage, and again and again insists that whatever our conditions may be, it is our business to make the best of them. To keep the mind in a state of healthy

¹ “Adventurer,” No. 120.

² “Rasselas,” chap. xxvii.

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activity,¹ and to enjoy as fully as possible the "short gleams of gaiety which life allows us,"² were central tenets of his practical philosophy; and, for the rest, though he held that "the cure for the greatest part of human miseries is not radical but palliative," he taught that through the exercise of patience—"the great remedy which Heaven has put in our hands"—we can in a measure "preserve the peace of the mind."³ I have already spoken of his own heroic struggle with poverty, hardship, ill-health, and the depression born of hypochondria; and now we see that his philosophy was at one with his practice.

In the second place we have to note that, pessimist as he was, he was saved from entire despair by the strength of his religious belief, which enabled him always to rest upon the thought of the providence of God and inspired him to look beyond the secular world to the "happier state" to which reference has just been made. As the last chapters of "Rasselas" and the singularly impressive conclusion of "The Vanity of Human Wishes" show, his stoical fortitude was supported by his Christian faith. Yet a man's religion, like everything else about him, takes the colour of his peculiar temperament; and Johnson's was heavily charged with his characteristic melancholy; it was a religion of fear, of spiritual self-torture, and, to use Professor William James' phrase, of

¹ "Do not suffer life to stagnate; it will grow muddy for want of motion. Commit yourself again to the current of the world." ("Rasselas," chap. xxxv.)

² Cp. letter in Boswell, pp. 497-498,

³ "Rambler," No. 32.

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"chronic anxiety." He was a believer, but it can scarcely be said that he found peace and joy in believing; consolation he found in it, a stay in affliction, a refuge from miseries which might otherwise have proved overwhelming; but neither peace nor joy. Moreover, we have to remember that, intense as were his feelings, he was not religious in the manner, say, of his great contemporary Wesley. He was, as Sir Leslie Stephen puts it, "a man of the world, though a religious man of the world," who "represents the secular rather than the ecclesiastical type," and to whom a certain reserve in the expression of his "religious emotions" was "almost a sanitary necessity." And it was well for him that he instinctively recognized his limitations, for, as the same critic adds, "if he had gone through the excitement of a Methodist conversion, he would probably have ended his days in a mad-house."¹ These points must be kept steadily in view, for they are essential to a proper understanding of his philosophy.

From such general considerations we may now turn to the great poem which they were designed to introduce :

THE VANITY OF HUMAN WISHES

THE TENTH SATIRE OF JUVENAL, IMITATED

Let Observation, with extensive view,
Survey mankind from China to Peru ;

¹ "Johnson" (in "English Men of Letters"), chap. i.

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

Remark each anxious toil, each eager strife,
And watch the busy scenes of crowded life ;
Then say how hope and fear, desire and hate,
O'erspread with snares the clouded maze of
fate,

Where wav'ring man, betray'd by vent'rous pride
To tread the dreary paths without a guide,
As treach'rous phantoms in the mist delude,
Shuns fancied ills, or chases airy good :

How rarely reason guides the stubborn choice,
Rules the bold hand, or prompts the suppliant
voice :

How nations sink, by darling schemes oppress'd,¹
When vengeance listens to the fool's request.
Fate wings with ev'ry wish th' afflictive dart,
Each gift of nature, and each grace of art :
With fatal heat impetuous courage glows,
With fatal sweetness elocution flows ;
Impeachment stops the speaker's pow'rful breath,
And restless fire precipitates on death.

But, scarce observ'd, the knowing and the bold
Fall in the gen'ral massacre of gold ;
Wide-wasting pest ! that rages unconfin'd,
And crowds with crimes the records of mankind.
For gold his sword the hireling ruffian draws,
For gold the hireling judge distorts the laws ;
Wealth heap'd on wealth nor truth nor safety
buys,

The dangers gather as the treasures rise.

Let hist'ry tell, where rival kings command,²
And dubious title shakes the madd'd land,

¹ The reference is to the financial disasters which had followed the collapse in England of the South Sea Bubble, in France of John Law's Mississippi Scheme.

² Only four years before the claims of the Young Pretender to the English Crown had been shattered at Culloden. A hint of Johnson's Tory leanings is given in the phrase "rival kings."

AND THEIR POETRY

When statutes glean the refuse of the sword,¹
How much more safe the vassal than the lord.
Low skulks the hind beneath the rage of pow'r,
And leaves the wealthy traitor in the Tow'r ;
Untouch'd his cottage, and his slumbers sound,
Tho' confiscation's vultures hover round.

The needy traveller, serene and gay,
Walks the wild heath, and sings his toil away.²
Does envy seize thee ? Crush th' upbraiding joy ;
Increase his riches, and his peace destroy.
Now fears in dire vicissitude invade,
The rustling brake alarms, and quiv'ring shade ;
Nor light nor darkness bring his pain relief,
One shows the plunder, and one hides the thief.

Yet still one gen'ral cry the skies assails,
And gain and grandeur load the tainted gales ;
Few know the toiling statesman's fear or care,
Th' insidious rival and the gaping heir.

Once more, Democritus,³ arise on earth,
With cheerful wisdom and instructive mirth :
See motley life in modern trappings dress'd,
And feed with varied fools th' eternal jest.
Thou who could'st laugh, where want enchain'd
caprice,

Toil crush'd conceit, and man was of a piece ;⁴
Where wealth, unlov'd, without a mourner dy'd,
And scarce a sycophant was fed by pride ;
Where ne'er was known the form of mock debate,⁵

¹ Acts of Attainder.

² Since to travel on foot was a sure sign of poverty the pedestrian was safe from the highwayman.

³ Democritus, the "laughing philosopher," is adopted from Juvenal:

"In his own age, Democritus could find
Sufficient cause to laugh at humankind."

Dryden's translation.

⁴ The uniformity of the simple old Greek life is contrasted with the variety of the "motley life" of modern civilization.

⁵ A debate with a foregone conclusion ; a frequent Parliamentary performance in Johnson's time, and not altogether unknown in ours.

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

Or seen a new-made mayor's unwieldy state ;¹
Where change of fav'rites made no change of laws,
And senates heard before they judg'd a cause ;
How would'st thou shake at Britain's modish
tribe,

Dart the quick taunt, and edge the piercing gibe,
Attentive truth and nature to descry,
And pierce each scene with philosophic eye !
To thee were solemn toys, or empty show,
The robes of pleasure and the veils of woe :
All aid the farce, and all thy mirth maintain,
Whose joys are causeless, or whose griefs are vain.

Such was the scorn that fill'd the sage's mind,
Renew'd at ev'ry glance on humankind ;
How just that scorn ere yet thy voice declare,
Search ev'ry state,² and canvass ev'ry pray'r.

Unnumber'd suplicants crowd Preferment's
gate,

Athirst for wealth, and burning to be great ;
→ Delusive Fortune hears th' incessant call,
They mount, they shine, evaporate, and fall.
On ev'ry stage the foes of peace attend,
Hate dogs their flight, and insult mocks their end.
Love ends with hope, the sinking statesman's
door³

Pours in the morning worshipper no more ;
For growing names the weekly scribbler lies,
To growing wealth the dedicator flies.
From ev'ry room descends the painted face,⁴
That hung the bright palladium of the place ;
And, smok'd in kitchens, or in auctions sold,
To better features yields the frame of gold :

¹ The Lord Mayor's Show.

² Every condition of life.

³ Alluding particularly to Sir Robert Walpole's fall in 1742.

⁴ The patron's portrait.

AND THEIR POETRY

For now no more we trace in ev'ry line
Heroic worth, benevolence divine :
The form distorted justifies the fall,
And detestation rids th' indignant wall.

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But will not Britain hear the last appeal,
Sign her foe's doom, or guard her fav'rite's zeal ?
Thro' Freedom's sons no more remonstrance rings,
Degrading nobles, and controlling kings ;
Our supple tribes repress their patriot throats,
And ask no questions but the price of votes ;
With weekly libels and septennial ale,
Their wish is full, to riot and to rail.

In full-blown dignity, see Wolsey stand,
Law in his voice, and fortune in his hand :
To him the church, the realm, their pow'rs con-
sign,

Thro' him the rays of regal bounty shine,
Turn'd by his nod the stream of honour flows,
His smile alone security bestows.

Still to new heights his restless wishes tow'r,
Claim leads to claim, and pow'r advances pow'r :

Till conquest unresisted ceas'd to please,
And rights submitted left him none to seize.

At length his sov'reign frowns—the train of state
Mark the keen glance, and watch the sign to hate.

Where'er he turns, he meets a stranger's eye,
His suppliants scorn him, and his followers fly :

Now drops at once the pride of awful state,

The golden canopy, the glitt'ring plate,

The regal palace, the luxurious board,

The liv'ried army, and the menial lord.

With age, with cares, with maladies oppress'd,

He seeks the refuge of monastic rest ;

Grief aids disease, remember'd folly stings,

And his last sighs reproach the faith of kings.

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

Speak thou whose thoughts at humble peace
repine,
Shall Wolsey's wealth, with Wolsey's end, be thine?
Or liv'st thou now, with safer pride content,
The wisest justice on the banks of Trent?
For why did Wolsey, near the steeps of fate,
On weak foundations raise th' enormous weight?
Why, but to sink beneath misfortune's blow,
With louder ruin to the gulfs below?

What gave great Villiers¹ to th' assassin's knife,
And fix'd disease on Harley's closing life?²
What murder'd Wentworth,³ and what exil'd
Hyde,⁴

By kings protected, and to kings ally'd?⁵
What but their wish indulg'd in courts to shine,
And pow'r too great to keep or to resign?

When first the college rolls receive his name,⁶ / 35
The young enthusiast quits his ease for fame;
Thro' all his veins the fever of renown
Burns from the strong contagion of the gown:
O'er Bodley's dome⁷ his future labours spread,
And Bacon's mansion⁸ trembles o'er his head.

¹ George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, the favourite of James I and Charles I, assassinated in 1628.

² Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, Tory Prime Minister, was impeached in 1715 for high treason in connexion with the Treaty of Utrecht and imprisoned in the Tower, but was released after two years. The cataloguing of his large library for the bookseller who had purchased it was one of Johnson's multifarious journeyman's tasks.

³ Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, one of Charles I's ill-advisers, was executed in 1641. Johnson's Toryism is shown by the choice of the word "murder'd."

⁴ Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, was impeached for high treason and exiled in 1667.

⁵ Hyde's daughter was married to the Duke of York, afterward James II.

⁶ Note the autobiographical interest of these lines. Johnson was once reading the poem aloud to Mrs Thrale and her circle and burst into tears over this passage.

⁷ The Bodleian Library.

⁸ There was long a tradition at Oxford that Friar Bacon's study, built on an arch on the bridge across the river, would fall when a man greater than Bacon should pass under it. "To prevent so shocking an accident it was pulled down many years since." (Malone.)

AND THEIR POETRY

Are these thy views? Proceed, illustrious youth,
And Virtue guard thee to the throne of Truth!
Yet should thy soul indulge the gen'rous heat
Till captive Science yields her last retreat;
Should Reason guide thee with her brightest
ray,

And pour on misty doubt resistless day;
Should no false kindness lure to loose delight,
Nor praise relax, nor difficulty fright;
Should tempting Novelty thy cell refrain,
And Sloth effuse her opiate fumes in vain;¹
Should Beauty blunt on fops her fatal dart,
Nor claim the triumph of a letter'd heart;
Should no disease thy torpid veins invade,
Nor Melancholy's phantoms haunt thy shade;
Yet hope not life from grief or danger free,
Nor think the doom of man revers'd for thee.
Deign on the passing world to turn thine eyes,
And pause awhile from letters to be wise;
There mark what ills the scholar's life assail,
Toil, envy, want, the patron, and the jail.²
See nations, slowly wise and meanly just,
To buried merit raise the tardy bust.³
If dreams yet flatter, once again attend,
Hear Lydiat's life,⁴ and Galileo's end.

¹ Johnson had always to fight hard against the sluggishness which was one result of his physical infirmities.

² In the first edition Johnson printed "the garret and the jail." The substitution of "patron" was prompted by his bitter experiences of patronage in his relations with Lord Chesterfield. See *post*, pp. 61-64.

³ This refers to the bust of Milton placed in Westminster Abbey in 1737. Johnson detested Milton's political and religious views, and his antipathy to him on these scores unquestionably interfered with his critical judgment of the great poet's writings. The generosity of this passage is therefore particularly noteworthy. (*Cp.* Boswell, p. 261.) In 1750 he provided Garrick with a Prologue for a performance of "Comus," arranged for the benefit of Milton's granddaughter, Elizabeth Foster, who was then keeping a chandler's shop. (See "Life of Milton.")

⁴ A scientist of New College, Oxford, who lived and died in great poverty (1572-1646).

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

Nor deem, when Learning her last prize bestows,
The glitt'ring eminence exempt from foes ;¹
See, when the vulgar 'scape, despis'd or aw'd,
Rebellion's vengeful talons seize on Laud.
From meaner minds tho' smaller fines content,
The plunder'd palace, or sequester'd rent,
Mark'd out by dang'rous parts, he meets the
shock,

And fatal learning leads him to the block :
Around his tomb let Art and Genius weep,
But hear his death, ye blockheads, hear and sleep.

The festal blazes, the triumphal show,
The ravish'd standard, and the captive foe,
The senate's thanks, the gazette's pompous tale,
With force resistless o'er the brave prevail.
Such bribes the rapid Greek o'er Asia whirl'd,
For such the steady Romans shook the world ;
For such in distant lands the Britons shine,
And stain with blood the Danube or the Rhine ;
This pow'r has praise, that virtue scarce can warm
Till fame supplies the universal charm.
Yet reason frowns on war's unequal game,
Where wasted nations raise a single name ;
And mortgag'd states their grandsires' wreaths
regret,
From age to age in everlasting debt ;
Wreaths which at last the dear-bought right
convey

To rust on medals, or on stones decay.

On what foundation stands the warrior's pride,
How just his hopes, let Swedish Charles² decide.
A frame of adamant, a soul of fire,
No dangers fright him, and no labours tire

¹ Laud was Archbishop of Canterbury.

² Charles XII of Sweden (1682-1718) is Johnson's parallel for Juvenal's Hannibal.

AND THEIR POETRY

O'er love, o'er fear, extends his wide domain,
Unconquer'd lord of pleasure and of pain ;
No joys to him pacific sceptres yield,
War sounds the trump, he rushes to the field.
Behold surrounding kings their pow'rs combine,
And one capitulate, and one resign :
Peace courts his hand, but spreads her charms in
vain ;

"Think nothing gain'd," he cries, "till nought
remain,

On Moscow's walls till Gothic standards fly,
And all be mine beneath the polar sky."

The march begins, in military state,
And nations on his eye suspended wait ;
Stern Famine guards the solitary coast,
And Winter barricades the realms of Frost ;
He comes, nor want nor cold his course
delay!—

Hide, blushing glory, hide Pultowa's day :
The vanquish'd hero leaves his broken bands,
And shows his miseries in distant lands ;
Condemn'd a needy supplicant to wait,
While ladies interpose, and slaves debate.
But did not Chance at length her error mend ?
Did no subverted empire mark his end ?
Did rival monarchs give the fatal wound ?
Or hostile millions press him to the ground ?
His fall was destin'd to a barren strand,
A petty fortress, and a dubious hand ;¹
He left the name at which the world grew pale,
To point a moral, or adorn a tale.

All times their scenes of pompous woes afford,
From Persia's tyrant to Bavaria's lord.

¹ He was killed, while invading Norway, by a chance shot from the fortress of Frederikshall.

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

In gay hostility, and barb'rous pride,
With half mankind embattled at his side,
Great Xerxes¹ comes to seize the certain prey,
And starves exhausted regions in his way.
Attendant flatt'ry counts his myriads o'er,
Till counted myriads soothe his pride no more.
Fresh praise is try'd, till madness fires his mind,
The waves he lashes, and enchains the wind ;
New pow'rs are claim'd, new pow'rs are still
bestow'd,
Till rude resistance lops the spreading god ;
The daring Greeks deride the martial show,
And heap their valleys with the gaudy foe.
Th' insulted sea with humbler thoughts he gains,
A single skiff to speed his flight remains ;
Th' encumber'd oar scarce leaves the dreaded
coast
Thro' purple billows and a floating host.

The bold Bavarian,² in a luckless hour,
Tries the dread summits of Cæsarean pow'r ;
With unexpected legions bursts away,
And sees defenceless realms receive his sway.
Short sway! fair Austria spreads her mournful
charms,
The queen, the beauty, sets the world in arms ;
From hill to hill the beacon's rousing blaze
Spreads wide the hope of plunder and of praise ;
The fierce Croatian, and the wild Hussar,
With all the sons of ravage, crowd the war :
The baffled prince, in honour's flatt'ring bloom,
Of hasty greatness, finds the fatal doom ;

¹ This example Johnson takes over from Juvenal.

² Charles Albert, Elector of Bavaria, was proclaimed Emperor in 1742. By her famous appeal to the Hungarian Diet Maria Theresa ("fair Austria") rallied the Magyars to her support, and with their aid she won back her crown. Charles died broken-hearted in 1745.

AND THEIR POETRY

His foes' derision and his subjects' blame,
And steals to death from anguish and from shame.

"Enlarge my life with multitude of days!"

In health, in sickness, thus the suppliant prays :
Hides from himself his state, and shuns to know
That life protracted is protracted woe.

Time hovers o'er, impatient to destroy,
And shuts up all the passages of joy :

In vain their gifts the bounteous seasons pour,
The fruit autumnal, and the vernal flow'r ;
With listless eyes the dotard views the store,
He views, and wonders that they please no
more ;

Now pall the tasteless meats and joyless wines,
And Luxury with sighs her slave resigns.

Approach, ye minstrels, try the soothing strain,
Diffuse the tuneful lenitives of pain :

No sounds, alas! would touch th' impervious ear,
Though dancing mountains witness'd Orpheus
near ;

Nor lute nor lyre his feeble pow'rs attend,

Nor sweeter music of a virtuous friend ;

But everlasting dictates crowd his tongue,

Perversely grave, or positively wrong ;

The still returning tale, and ling'ring jest,

Perplex the fawning niece and pamper'd guest,

While growing hopes scarce awe the gath'ring
sneer,

And scarce a legacy can bribe to hear :

The watchful guests still hint the last offence,

The daughter's petulance, the son's expense,

Improve his heady rage with treach'rous skill,

And mould his passions till they make his will.

Unnumber'd maladies his joints invade,

Lay siege to life, and press the dire blockade ;

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

But unextinguish'd av'rice still remains,
And dreaded losses aggravate his pains :
He turns, with anxious heart and crippled hands,
His bonds of debt, and mortgages of lands ;
Or views his coffers with suspicious eyes,
Unlocks his gold, and counts it till he dies.

But grant, the virtues of a temp'rate prime
Bless with an age exempt from scorn or crime ;
An age that melts with unperceiv'd decay,
And glides in modest innocence away ;
Whose peaceful day benevolence endears,
Whose night congratulating conscience cheers ;
The gen'ral fav'rite, as the gen'ral friend :
Such age there is, and who shall wish its end ? ¹

Yet ev'n on this her load Misfortune flings,
To press the weary minutes' flagging wings ;
New sorrow rises as the day returns,
A sister sickens, or a daughter mourns.
Now kindred merit fills the sable bier,
Now lacerated friendship claims a tear.
Year chases year, decay pursues decay,
Still drops some joy from with'ring life away ;
New forms arise, and diff'rent views engage,
Superfluous lags the vet'ran on the stage,
Till pitying Nature signs the last release,
And bids afflicted worth retire to peace.

But few there are whom hours like these await,
Who set unclouded in the gulfs of fate.
From Lydia's monarch ² should the search
descend,
By Solon caution'd to regard his end,
In life's last scene what prodigies surprise,
Fears of the brave, and follies of the wise !

¹ This passage refers to Johnson's mother.

² Croesus.

AND THEIR POETRY

From Marlborough's eyes the streams of dotage
flow,

And Swift expires a driv'ler and a show.

The teeming mother, anxious for her race,
Begs for each birth the fortune of a face ;
Yet Vane¹ could tell what ills from beauty spring,
And Sedley² curs'd the form that pleas'd a king.
Ye nymphs of rosy lips and radiant eyes,
Whom pleasure keeps too busy to be wise,
Whom joys with soft varieties invite,
By day the frolic, and the dance by night ;
Who frown with vanity, who smile with art,
And ask the latest fashion of the heart ;
What care, what rules, your heedless charms shall
save,

Each nymph your rival, and each youth your
slave ?

Against your fame with fondness hate combines,
The rival batters, and the lover mines.
With distant voice neglected Virtue calls,
Less heard, and less, the faint remonstrance falls ;
Tir'd with contempt, she quits the slipp'ry reign,
And Pride and Prudence take her seat in vain.
In crowd at once, where none the pass defend,
The harmless freedom, and the private friend :
The guardians yield, by force superior ply'd,
To Int'rest, Prudence ; and to Flatt'ry, Pride.
Here beauty falls, betray'd, despis'd, distress'd,
And hissing Infamy proclaims the rest.

Where then shall hope and fear their objects
find ?

Must dull suspense corrupt the stagnant mind ?

¹ Probably Anne Vane, mistress of Frederick, Prince of Wales. She died in 1736.

² Catherine, daughter of Sir Charles Sedley, and mistress of James II, by whom she was created Countess of Dorset.

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

Must helpless man, in ignorance sedate,
Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate ?
Must no dislike alarm, no wishes rise,
No cries invoke the mercies of the skies ?
Inquirer, cease : petitions yet remain,
Which Heav'n may hear : nor deem religion vain.
Still raise for good the supplicating voice,
But leave to Heav'n the measure and the choice.
Safe in his pow'r, whose eyes discern afar
The secret ambush of a specious pray'r,
Implore his aid, in his decisions rest,
Secure, whate'er he gives, he gives the best.
Yet when the sense of sacred presence fires,
And strong devotion to the skies aspires,
Pour forth thy fervours for a healthful mind,¹
Obedient passions, and a will resign'd ;
For love, which scarce collective man can fill ;
For patience, sov'reign o'er transmuted ill ;
For faith, that, panting for a happier seat,
Counts death kind Nature's signal of retreat.
These goods for man the laws of Heav'n ordain,
These goods he grants, who grants the pow'r to
gain ;
With these celestial Wisdom calms the mind,
And makes the happiness she does not find.

IV

TAKING advantage of the enhanced reputation which "The Vanity of Human Wishes" had secured for him, Johnson, in the March of the following year, began the issue of a bi-weekly periodical

¹ This line gains greatly in significance when we remember Johnson's lifelong dread of insanity.

AND THEIR POETRY

essay—one of the many imitations of the popular “Spectator”—called “The Rambler.” This he produced practically single-handed (for of the 208 papers all but ten were from his pen) till March 1752. Scarcely had he brought it to a close when he suffered a heavy blow in the death of his wife. Like many another brave man before and since, he sought relief from his sorrow in hard work; continued his labours on the “Dictionary”; and took “an active part” in another periodical, “The Adventurer,” recently started by his “warm admirer,” Dr John Hawkesworth. At length the “Dictionary” was completed, and in 1755 it was published in two volumes folio, on the title-pages of which he was privileged to print himself “M.A.”: Oxford in the meantime having bestowed upon him the long-deferred degree. I have already referred in passing to his relations with Lord Chesterfield, and the tale that hangs thereby has now to be told. When eight years before he had drawn up the plan of the “Dictionary,” he had dedicated his work to Chesterfield as a man of rank and social standing, whose interest and influence would be likely to contribute to its success. Chesterfield, though he accepted the honour, took no notice of the toiling and still obscure lexicographer until he learned that his task was actually finished, and then he hastened to recommend it to the public in a couple of papers in that very aristocratic periodical, “The World.” Johnson was stung to the quick:

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

“I have sailed,” he said to Garrick, “a long and painful voyage round the world of the English language, and does he now send out two cock-boats to tow me into harbour?” His wrath exploded in his famous letter to Chesterfield, which, familiar as it doubtless is to most readers, cannot be omitted from any sketch of Johnson, however brief.

My Lord,—

I have been lately informed by the proprietor of “The World,” that two papers, in which my Dictionary is recommended to the public, were written by your Lordship. To be so distinguished, is an honour, which, being very little accustomed to favours from the great, I know not well how to receive, or in what terms to acknowledge.

When, upon some slight encouragement, I first visited your Lordship, I was overpowered, like the rest of mankind, by the enchantment of your address, and could not forbear to wish that I might boast myself *Le vainqueur du vainqueur de la terre*;¹ that I might obtain that regard for which I saw the world contending; but I found my attendance so little encouraged that neither pride nor modesty would suffer me to continue it. When I had once addressed your Lordship in public, I had exhausted all the arts of pleasing which a retired and uncourtly scholar can possess. I had done all that I could; and no man is well pleased to have his all neglected, be it ever so little.

Seven years, my Lord, have now passed, since I waited in your outward rooms, or was repulsed from your door; during which time I have been pushing

¹ Incorrectly quoted from Scudéry's “Alaric”: “Je chante le vainqueur des vainqueurs de la terre.”

AND THEIR POETRY

on my work through difficulties, of which it is useless to complain, and have brought it, at last, to the verge of publication, without one act of assistance, one word of encouragement, or one smile of favour. Such treatment I did not expect, for I never had a Patron before.

The shepherd in Virgil grew at last acquainted with Love, and found him a native of the rocks.¹

Is not a Patron, my Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help? ² The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it; till I am known, and do not want it. I hope it is no very cynical asperity not to confess obligations where no benefit has been received, or to be unwilling that the public should consider me as owing that to a Patron, which Providence has enabled me to do for myself.

Having carried on my work thus far with so little obligation to any favourer of learning, I shall not be disappointed though I should conclude it, if less be possible, with less; for I have been long wakened from that dream of hope, in which I once boasted myself with so much exultation, my Lord,

Your Lordship's most humble, most obedient
servant, SAM. JOHNSON³

Chesterfield made no reply to this letter, but it is safe to assume that it penetrated even

¹ "Eclogues," viii, 44-46.

² *Cp.* the definition of patron in the Dictionary: "One who countenances, supports, or protects; usually a wretch who supports with insolence and is repaid with flattery."

³ Boswell, pp. 86, 87.

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

through the triple brass of his conceit. As Sir Leslie Stephen has said, it was "one of those knock-down blows to which no answer is possible and upon which comment is superfluous." Moreover, its interest is historic as well as personal, for, in Carlyle's characteristic phrase, it was "the far-famed blast of doom proclaiming into the ear of Lord Chesterfield and through him to the listening world, that patronage should be no more."

The publication of the "Dictionary" was a decisive event in Johnson's life; it raised him into the position of authority which he was to occupy to the end; henceforth he was the acknowledged Dictator of Letters and, as Smollett put it, "the great Cham of Literature." Yet the fame it brought him did not relieve him from the necessity of "making provision for the day that was passing over him," and he was still obliged to continue his miscellaneous journalistic work.¹ "The Rambler" having proved profitable, he presently embarked upon another series of periodical essays, "The Idler," which he contributed every Saturday to a newspaper, "The Universal Chronicle,"² from April 1758 to April 1760. While these were in progress his mother, to whom he was deeply attached, died at Lichfield. According to Boswell, it was to defray the expenses of her

¹ To illustrate his precarious condition it may be mentioned that in 1756 he was arrested for a debt of £5 18s. He was, however, saved from imprisonment by Richardson the novelist, who in response to his appeal sent him six guineas.

² Twelve of the 103 papers were provided by friends.

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funeral and to pay off some small debts which she had left that he wrote the most widely read and most characteristic of all his works, the didactic story (which is indeed less a story than a series of essays strung upon the thread of an Oriental narrative)—“The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia”; and Boswell adds, on the authority of Sir Joshua Reynolds, that this was composed in the evenings of a single week and sent to press in portions without revision. These statements, though they form part of a popular tradition, are now impugned by expert criticism, and the circumstances of the origin and publication of the book remain obscure. It is probable that it was finished in January 1759, while his mother was lying dangerously ill, and published in March or April. We know, however, that he received £100 for the manuscript and an additional £25 on the appearance of a second edition before the year was out.

But though he was thus able to earn far more substantial sums by his pen than he had done in the old days when he had been “toiling at the oar” for Cave, his financial safety was not secured till 1762, when the Government granted him a pension of £300 a year. He felt at first some compunction about accepting the favour; had he not in his “Dictionary” explained *pension* as “generally understood to mean pay given to a state hireling for treason to his country”? He was, however, assured that his own pension, being intended only as a mark

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of recognition for services rendered to scholarship, did not fall within this caustic definition, and he yielded. The sum was not large, but it sufficed to make him independent, and he was glad enough to have it. "I cannot now curse the House of Hanover," he remarked, with humorous reference to his Jacobite proclivities; "but I think that the pleasure of cursing the House of Hanover and drinking King James's health are amply overbalanced by three hundred pounds a year."

Already before his wife's death he had begun to gather about him those curious objects of his charity who amused his more aristocratic friends and gave a handle to the ridicule of his enemies; and now in his widowerhood his house in Gough Square became, in Macaulay's phrase, a kind of menagerie. There was a Mrs Anna Williams, daughter of a Welsh doctor, a woman of some ability, blind through cataract and soured by suffering and disappointment. There were Mrs Desmoulins, the daughter of Dr Swinfen, and her daughter, and another impoverished lady named Carmichael. There was an unsuccessful physician, Robert Levet, an eccentric and taciturn man who practised for small fees among "the lowest people," and of whose extremely mediocre talents Johnson entertained an extravagant admiration. All these were more or less dependent upon him, and to these we must add, to make our account of his household complete, his devoted black servant Francis

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Barber and his favourite cat Hodge, "for whom," as Boswell records—grudgingly, for he was one of those unfortunate persons who are not fond of cats—Johnson himself "used to go out and buy oysters." Though we have to anticipate events to do so it will be convenient for us to notice here that the loss of one of these companions in 1782 was the occasion of the only one of Johnson's minor poems which adds at all to his reputation—the following simple and tender elegy :

ON THE DEATH OF MR ROBERT LEVET

Condemn'd to Hope's delusive mine,
As on we toil from day to day,
By sudden blasts or slow decline
Our social comforts drop away.

Well tried through many a varying year,
See Levet to the grave descend ;
Officious, innocent, sincere,
Of every friendless name the friend.

Yet still he fills Affection's eye,
Obscurely wise and coarsely kind ;
Nor, letter'd Arrogance, deny
Thy praise to merit unrefin'd.

When fainting Nature call'd for aid,
And hovering Death prepared the blow,
His vigorous remedy display'd
The power of Art without the show.

In Misery's darkest cavern known
His useful care was ever nigh ;

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Where hopeless Anguish pour'd his groan,
And lonely Want retired to die.

No summons mock'd by chill delay ;
No petty gain disdain'd by pride ;
The modest wants of every day
The toil of every day supplied.

His virtues walk'd their narrow round,
Nor made a pause, nor left a void ;
And sure the Eternal Master found
The single talent well employ'd.

The busy day, the peaceful night,
Unfelt, unclouded, glided by ;
His frame was firm, his powers were bright,
Though now his eightieth year was nigh.

Then with no fiery, throbbing pain,
No cold gradations of decay,
Death broke at once the vital chain,
And freed his soul the nearest way.

These various inmates of Johnson's establishment¹ did not always get on very well together, and their bickerings must often have been a sore trial to a man of his impatient temper and nervous irritability. But little of his leisure time was spent within the four walls of his home ; social intercourse was a necessity to him as a way of escape out of himself and his morbid fancies ; and he now had a large circle of friends and acquaintances which included many of the most prominent men of the

¹ Johnson presently left Gough Square and settled first in the Inner Temple, then in Johnson's Court, and finally in Bolt Court, Fleet Street, where he died.

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day in nearly every walk of life. Then from 1764 "the hub of the solar universe" was for him the famous Club, which was founded in that year, and which had for its first meeting-place the Turk's Head, in Gerrard Street, Soho. Its original members, besides Johnson himself, were Sir (as yet Mr) Joshua Reynolds; Edmund Burke; Dr Christopher Nugent (Burke's father-in-law); Anthony Chamier, of the Public Service; Topham Beauclerk, a clever but rakish man about town; Benet Langton, a country gentleman of scholarly tastes and high moral character; John Hawkins, a lawyer; and Oliver Goldsmith. The last-named of these forms the second subject of our present study, and to him we must now turn. Before doing so I will just note that the composition of the Club underwent many changes as time passed on, and that its membership was considerably enlarged; the most important of the additions for us at the moment being James Boswell, who was introduced to Johnson in 1763, and elected ten years later.

V

ACCORDING to the generally accepted account, though neither place nor date is absolutely certain, Oliver Goldsmith was born on November 10, 1728, at Pallas, or Pallasmore, County Longford, Ireland. He was the fifth in order of the eight children of the Rev. Charles Goldsmith, a Protestant

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clergyman, whose uncertain annual income is estimated to have averaged something like £40, which was, as we remember, the very sum on which the good parson of "The Deserted Village" passed for rich among his parishioners. When Oliver was two his father was presented to the neighbouring living of Kilkenny West, which was worth about £200 a year, and moved to a farm of seventy acres on the borders of Lissoy, County Westmeath. This pretty village was the home of the poet's boyhood, and is traditionally regarded as the original of the "Sweet Auburn" of his later fancy. From the charge of Dame Delap, who taught him his letters, he passed in due course into that of Thomas (more familiarly Paddy) Byrne, the village schoolmaster, whose portrait is painted for us in "The Deserted Village," and thence into the hands of other teachers, first at Elphin, in Roscommon, then at Athlone, then at Edgeworthstown; but so far as we know he gained little from his schooling beyond a general reputation for idleness and stupidity. He was indeed the most eccentric member of an eccentric family, and in early life his peculiarities were more in evidence than his talents. None the less his relatives were ambitious that he should have a university education, and in June 1745, having not yet completed his seventeenth year, he entered Trinity College, Dublin. His father's straitened circumstances, however, obliged him to accept a sizarship, a position which entailed the wearing of a

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servant's garb and the performance of various menial duties in return for tuition and board. Poor Goldsmith, with his sensitive nature, suffered keenly from these conditions, while, to make matters worse, the death of his father early in 1747 brought his scanty supplies from home to an end. Unfortunate in his tutors and wretched in his surroundings, he henceforth led a shiftless life of poverty, misery, and dissipation, finding his principal consolation in a German flute, which he had learned to play, and into which he was accustomed to blow his sorrows with a kind of "mechanical vehemence": though how much sorrow he blew out of it to those about him is nowhere recorded.

On February 27, 1749, after many misadventures, he managed at last to scramble through his examinations and to obtain his degree, his name standing "lowest in the list still existing of the graduates who passed on the same day";¹ and having thus won his academic laurels he returned to his widowed mother in her cottage at Ballymahon. Then followed various attempts on the part of his relatives, especially of his generous uncle, Mr Contarine,² to get him started on some definite career. They thought first of the Church, but his application to the Bishop of Elphin was rejected—tradition says because the candidate for ordination appeared before

¹ Forster's "Life and Times of Goldsmith," Book I, chap. ii.

² The Rev. Mr Contarine had married his father's sister.

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his Right Reverence in scarlet breeches. An experiment in tutoring proved a failure. After this Oliver conceived the idea of emigrating to America ; got as far as Cork, where he lost all his money ; and in six weeks turned up again at his mother's door on a bony horse, which he playfully called Fiddleback. Uncle Contarine now suggested London and the law ; but this time the youth got stranded in Dublin and squandered the £50, which had been provided for his expenses, at a gaming table. So after three years his outlook was as blank as it had been on the day he left college. But even now Uncle Contarine's good-nature remained unexhausted, and he proposed that the young ne'er-do-well should try his fortune in medicine. Accordingly he crossed to Edinburgh, then famous for its medical school, and there he lived as a student from the autumn of 1752 till the spring of 1754. With what regularity and profit he applied himself to the professional curriculum is not very clear, but "it seems tolerably certain that any learned celebrity he may have got in the schools paled an ineffectual fire before his amazing social repute as an inimitable teller of humorous stories and capital singer of Irish songs."¹ Eighteen months at Edinburgh having, however, convinced him that he had seen "all that this country can exhibit in a medical way," he resolved to pursue his studies on the Continent, and transferred himself to Leyden, where for

¹ Forster, Book I, chap. iv.

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nearly a year he attended lectures, meanwhile supporting himself as best he might by teaching, winning money by gambling, and anon losing all he had won. But his restless nature was still unsatisfied, and now that the novelty of Leyden had worn off, he made up his mind to see something more of the world. In those days the Grand Tour of Europe was a regular part of a wealthy young Englishman's education. Goldsmith was not an Englishman, and he was not wealthy, but, fired by the example of the famous Danish author, Holberg, just then dead,¹ he determined to make the Grand Tour all the same; and in February 1755 he set out on his adventures with a guinea in his pocket, one shirt—on his back—and his inseparable companion, his German flute.

Though his letters of the time have perished and we have no source of information other than the autobiographical matter in his published writings—notably the chapter describing George Primrose's "philosophic vagabondage" in "The Vicar of Wakefield"—we can follow him without much difficulty through Flanders to Paris, where he made a lengthy stay, thence into Switzerland, across the Alps into Italy, and then homeward by way of France. But while his itinerary is thus fairly clear, it is quite impossible to say how he contrived to live. We can only guess that

¹ See what he says about Holberg and his travels in "The Present State of Polite Learning," chap. v. Ludwig Holberg (1684-1754), dramatist, satirist, and historian, was a Norwegian by birth, but he lived and worked in Copenhagen, and belongs entirely to Danish literature.

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he sometimes depended upon the hospitality of convents and colleges, sometimes slept in barns or by the wayside, sometimes gained a supper and a night's lodging and perhaps a few odd coins by playing his flute,¹ and sometimes was reduced to begging outright. Had we all the details we should doubtless find that this Grand Tour of his was attended by many hardships and vicissitudes; but be that as it may, it gave him an invaluable education. Those months which he spent afoot in various lands, mingling familiarly with their peoples and seeing for himself the conditions under which they lived, made him a true Citizen of the World, and the knowledge and insight which he thus obtained were of immense service to him in later years. And here, as we may note in passing, we touch a point of vital difference between our two subjects, Goldsmith's breadth of view and cosmopolitan sympathies presenting a striking contrast with Johnson's narrowness and insular prejudices.

On February 1, 1756, the wanderer landed at Dover, whence he tramped to London, which he now saw for the first time and which was henceforth to be his home. With what vague dreams of future fortune he may have entered the metropolis we can never know, but whatever they were they were soon dissipated by contact with rude reality. Somewhere on the Continent—perhaps at Louvain, perhaps at Padua—he had obtained a medical degree, but,

¹ See in particular the passage in "The Traveller," *post*, p. 110.

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penniless and friendless as he was, he could scarcely hope immediately to turn his professional qualifications to account. His needs were urgent, and he had to seek for any means of saving himself from starvation. For a short time he acted as assistant to an apothecary in Fish Street Hill. Then, after a vain attempt to establish a practice among the poor of Southwark, he was successively corrector to the press of Samuel Richardson and usher in a Peckham School.¹ So for some three years he managed just to exist. Johnson's struggle with poverty had, as we have seen, been hard enough; Goldsmith's was even harder. Sometimes, in the days of his fame, he would startle a polite circle of listeners at Sir Joshua Reynolds' or Topham Beauclerk's by introducing some anecdote with the words: "When I lived among the beggars in Axe Lane." Such were the depths of misery to which he had sunk.

At last he drifted into authorship, not because he had as yet realized that his true vocation was literature, but simply because "the dogs of hunger were at his heels," and he now discovered that he had a gift of scribbling, out of which a little profit might be made. He embarked upon this new form of drudgery by writing criticisms for the "Monthly Review,"

¹ The experiences of George Primrose's cousin in "The Vicar of Wakefield" (chap. xx) are undoubtedly autobiographical: "I have been an usher at a boarding school myself. . . . I was up early and late; I was brow-beat by the master, hated for my ugly face by the mistress [Goldsmith was badly pitted by smallpox], worried by the boys, and never permitted to stir out to meet civility abroad." *Cp.* the essay "On Education" in "The Bee," No. VI.

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and before he quarrelled, as he soon did, with its proprietor, Ralph Griffiths, he also translated for him the *Memoirs of a French Protestant*, Jean de Bergerac. For nearly two years he laboured miserably at "authorship by compulsion," always in debt, always seeking to escape from his slavery, always driven back into it by ever-repeated disappointments; his home, meanwhile, being a garret in Green Arbour Court, Fleet Street, where he lived and wrote amid scenes of squalid penury. Then in 1759 he emerged a little from his obscurity with the publication of his "*Inquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe*"—inspired, it would seem, by the hope of raising funds for some never-obtained medical appointment in India; and from this production his career in literature may properly be said to date. In October of the same year he began the issue of a miscellany called "*The Bee*," and though this ran only to the eighth number, it brought him to the notice of Smollett, who enlisted his services for his "*British Magazine*," and of the bookseller John Newbery, to whose "*Public Ledger*" he contributed a series of "*Chinese Letters*," afterward republished in volume form under the title of "*The Citizen of the World*." He had now gained a certain reputation with the public and the critics; he had plenty of work to do for the booksellers; and the consequent improvement in his financial position enabled him to move from Green Arbour Court into

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more respectable quarters in Wine Office Court, near Temple Bar. This change was made toward the end of 1760. Some six months later—to be exact, on May 31, 1761—he gave a supper party in his lodgings, the guest of honour at which was Samuel Johnson. When and in what circumstances Goldsmith and Johnson had first met, we do not know, but that memorable evening is for us the beginning of their famous friendship. /

The intimate relationship of these two men, so different in intellectual and moral qualities yet so congenial and sympathetic, is interesting for the light that it throws on the characters of both. Goldsmith's attachment to Johnson had all the warmth of his affectionate nature, but it was at the same time, as Boswell calls it, a "respectful attachment," in which personal devotion was mingled with the deference of a younger and little-known author toward an older one whose reputation was already made. He often suffered from Johnson's rough handling, and sometimes protested against it; "there is no arguing with Johnson," he once complained, "for if his pistol misses fire he knocks you down with the butt end of it."¹ But no one realized more fully than he did the

¹ Though generally overwhelmed by Johnson, Goldsmith however sometimes stood up to him, and occasionally scored. Even Boswell, whose jealousy caused him always to present Goldsmith under the worst possible light, gives instances. Once, for example, the discussion fell on the writing of fables, and Johnson began to laugh uproariously when Goldsmith admired the skill with which certain little fishes had been made to talk "like little fishes." "Why, Dr Johnson," was Goldsmith's retort to this hilarity, "this is not so easy as you seem to think; for if you were to make little fishes talk, they would talk like whales." A palpable hit!

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fine and generous humanity which lay concealed beneath "the great Bear's" prejudices, his frequent brutality of speech, his fits of moroseness and bad temper: "Johnson, to be sure, has a roughness in his manner, but no man alive has a more tender heart. He has nothing of the bear but his skin." And as in Goldsmith's affection for Johnson there was always a touch of reverence as for an acknowledged master, so on the other hand Johnson's attitude toward 'Goldy' clearly suggested the protector as well as the friend. He often bullied Goldsmith, it is true, but he would never allow anyone else to do so; at times he spoke harshly of his weaknesses, but he was always ready to defend him against others,¹ and took every occasion to praise his genius and recommend his work. An anecdote connected with the supper just referred to provides an amusing illustration of the feelings which on one and the other side were always to characterize the intercourse of the two friends. It happened that the Rev. Dr Percy (afterward Bishop of Dromore), who was one of the guests, called for Johnson on the way to Wine Office Court, and was surprised to find him dressed with unwonted neatness and care; in fact, says Percy, "he had on a new suit of

¹ Thus, *e.g.*: "Goldsmith, in his diverting simplicity, complained one day, in a mixed company, of Lord Camden. 'I met him,' said he, 'at Lord Clare's house in the country, and he took no more notice of me than if I had been an ordinary man.' The company having laughed heartily, Johnson stood forth in defence of his friend. 'Nay, gentlemen,' said he, 'Dr Goldsmith is in the right. A nobleman ought to have made up to such a man as Goldsmith; and I think it is much against Lord Camden that he neglected him.'" (Boswell, p. 476.)

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clothes, a new wig nicely powdered, and everything about him so perfectly dissimilar from his usual habits and appearance that his companion could not help inquiring the cause of this singular transformation." Johnson's reply was brief and to the point: "Why, sir, I hear that Goldsmith, who is a very great sloven, justifies his disregard of cleanliness and decency by quoting my practice; and I am desirous this night to show him a better example."

Though his friendship with Johnson improved his position in the world of letters Goldsmith had still to depend for a livelihood upon his contributions to periodicals and his miscellaneous hack-work for the booksellers, for whom he compiled various volumes of biography and history—a life of Beau Nash, a life of Voltaire, a "History of Mecklenburg," a "History of England in a Series of Letters from a Nobleman to his Son." Such "honest journey-work in default of better" served to keep him going. But his fame was not established till 1764, when, already a member of the Club (to which he had been admitted wholly on the strength of Johnson's recommendation) he published the first of his important works, "The Traveller; or, A Prospect of Society." This poem came as a revelation not only to the general reading public, but also and even more to his acquaintances, those who thought they knew him best being most surprised by what he had done. With his insignificant

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appearance, his eccentricities of behaviour, his slowness of wit in conversation, and his curious talent for blundering, he had made but a poor figure in the brilliant circle of men of the world and clever talkers in which none the less it was his constant ambition to shine. He had indeed been the recognized butt and laughing-stock of his companions, who regarded him as a good-natured and amusing simpleton, and not one of whom (Johnson of course excepted) had as yet the slightest inkling of his extraordinary powers. Hence their astonishment that this "newspaper essayist and bookseller's drudge" should actually be capable of such a poem, and the foolish theory which at first gained currency among them that Johnson himself was largely responsible for it. Here we may fittingly mark another salient point of contrast between the two friends. Johnson was essentially the talker; he needed the stimulus of discussion to draw out his finest qualities; and his vigorous genius shows to far better advantage in the raciness of his conversations than in the often ponderous formality of his printed pages. Goldsmith, on the contrary, was essentially the writer; solitude, not society, was his proper intellectual environment; as Johnson said of him, in company he grew confused and stumbled in his speech, but the moment he took a pen in his hand it became a magic wand.

"There has not been so fine a poem since Pope's time," was Johnson's emphatic

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judgment upon "The Traveller," and the work was also warmly praised by the critics. But though Goldsmith had thus proved his genius as a poet he allowed nearly six years to elapse before he made a second appearance in the same rôle with "The Deserted Village" (May 1770). That he should have delayed so long in following up his success will, however, seem surprising only to those who forget that even a poet is conditioned by the circumstances of his life. Like any other craftsman Goldsmith had to watch the market and to bow before the iron law of supply and demand, and the paucity of his production in verse is thus easily explained; as he himself bluntly said, "I cannot afford to court the draggletail Muses; they would let me starve." Even the high reputation which he had now achieved, gratifying as it was, did not emancipate him from his bondage to the booksellers, and historical compilations were still his principal means of support. But though he left poetry alone he won further fame, and something more substantial than fame, in other fields—in prose fiction with his one novel "The Vicar of Wakefield" (1766), and on the stage with the first of his comedies, "The Good-Natured Man" (1768). As we are here concerned only with his poetry consideration of these works does not fall within our scope, and it will therefore be sufficient to say in regard to them that the £60 which he obtained for the manuscript of the former saved him from imprisonment

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for arrears of rent,¹ while the proceeds of the latter, amounting to a sum greater than the happy author had ever had in his possession before, were devoted to the purchase of the lease of new and more commodious chambers in Brick Court, Middle Temple. Unfortunately, however, this sudden access of prosperity turned poor Goldsmith's head. Always hopelessly incompetent where money was concerned, he spent so much on his handsome furniture that he ran forthwith into debt and involved himself in financial difficulties which he was never afterward to surmount.

VI

IN taking up for study "The Traveller" and "The Deserted Village" we have first to lay stress upon their biographical interest.

The peculiarly personal quality of Goldsmith's work is a commonplace of criticism. With perfect justice he is described as one of the most subjective of our writers. Beyond most men he projected himself into everything he

¹ The reader will find in Boswell, p. 140, Johnson's own picturesque account of what happened on that fateful morning in 1766 when, in response to Goldsmith's message of distress, he hurried to his lodgings, "found that his landlady had arrested him for the rent," learned from him that "he had a novel ready for the press," looked into it, saw its merit, and took it off to a bookseller, to whom he sold it out of hand for £60. It is, however, only proper to add that, circumstantial as the story is, it can hardly be correct in all its details. Into the difficult questions connected with the sale and publication of the work I have entered at some length in the Appendix to my edition of "The Vicar of Wakefield" in Heath's "English Classics,"

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wrote ; beyond most he carried into literature not only his temperament but also his life. Anyone who looks at his work at all critically will at once be struck by the fact that, superficially varied as it is, it is singularly narrow in range ; there is a conspicuous sameness about its themes and sentiments ; it is made out of a very few elements, though these elements are cunningly arranged and rearranged into ever fresh combinations. Goldsmith's production is thus circumscribed, and he thus continually repeats himself in it, in part because his actual creative power was relatively small, but in the main (and as a result of this) because he rarely goes outside himself and builds almost entirely with the materials which his own experiences had provided for him. The "Chinese Letters" are full of autobiography. In his miscellaneous essays he everlastingly discourses, avowedly or unavowedly, about himself. "She Stoops to Conquer" is known to have been based upon a highly characteristic youthful blunder of his own ; Tony Lumpkin in that comedy, young Honeywood in "The Good-Natured Man," the Gentleman in Black in the "Letters," the simple Moses in "The Vicar of Wakefield" are all, as Professor Masson put it, "so many reproductions of phases of himself" ; George Primrose's "philosophic vagabondage" was, as we have said, obviously a version of his Continental wanderings ; while just as obviously the painter's model for the Rev. Dr Primrose

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was his father. And if this strongly personal quality is everywhere apparent in his prose writings it is, as on general principles we might anticipate, even more apparent in his two great poems, for in these he does not attempt independent creation, but is from first to last occupied with his own memories, his own reflections, his own most intimate feelings. "The Traveller," sketched while he was still abroad, owes all its descriptive passages to direct observation and all its sentiment to emotional experiences through which he had actually passed. "The Deserted Village" is a dream of men and things he had once known and loved; the good parish priest in it is a kind of composite portrait of his father and his brother Henry; the rustic pedagogue is the Paddy Byrne of his boyhood; while the "village statesmen" gathered about the old inn hearth—where "news much older than the ale went round"—are, we cannot doubt, like all the other details in his picture of Auburn in its palmy days, faithful transcripts from life. The effect of this personal element upon the general quality of the two poems we shall note presently. But here a point must be made, the important bearings of which will at once be manifest. While drawing habitually for his raw materials upon the stock of his own experience, Goldsmith was prevented by the fundamental nature of his genius from being in any ~~sense a~~ realist. He transcribed, but, unlike Crabbe, he did not transcribe photo-

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graphically.¹ On the contrary, he idealized everything he touched. Looking at life through a poetic medium, he transformed fact into fantasy. Though he describes what he has seen and known, he habitually describes it as it appeared to him years afterward, mellowed and beautified by the haze which always gathers about what is past. All his most characteristic writings thus belong, in Masson's admirable phrase, to the class of "idealized reminiscence." The harder outlines of actuality are softened in his pages; the real world is raised by the imagination of the poet into a sweeter and purer atmosphere than that of everyday life.

Having now learned something of the purely personal interest of "The Traveller" and "The Deserted Village," we must look at them next from the critical point of view. Here it will be desirable to glance at the literary movements of Goldsmith's time and to define his own position in respect of them.

As any history of English literature will tell us, his age was not fertile in poetry. Its greater names are few, and of the writers in whom the true poetic note is most clearly to be heard, the majority, like Goldsmith himself, were conspicuously unprolific. Into the causes of this general decline in poetry we are not now concerned to enter. What we have to

¹ Cp., for example, the description of the priest and the inn in "The Deserted Village" with the corresponding passages (which were written indeed as a direct protest against Goldsmith's idealism) in Crabbe's poem "The Village."

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observe is, that when the poetic output of the time is taken in the mass and studied in the light of contemporary criticism, it reveals a growing conflict between two antagonistic forces. On the one hand, there is much in it that exhibits the surviving power of the great Augustan school. Men were still using the vehicle of metre for the purposes to which the Age of Pope had put it; they continued to write satire and didactic verse; their poetry, like that of the preceding generation whose lead they followed, was a poetry rather of the intellect than of the emotions and the imagination. In form, too, they adhered to the established Classic couplet, perfected by Pope and now reproduced with monotonous precision by countless minor versifiers who, as Cowper put it, had got his tune by heart; and their diction was of that highly conventional and rhetorical kind which had resulted from the deliberate substitution of the artificial for the natural, the ornate for the simple, the periphrastic for the direct. But while the traditions of the Augustans were thus being maintained, there was, on the other hand, evidence in plenty of a rising reaction against their theories and methods. Critics and poets alike were beginning to grow restive under the restraints to which English poetry had long been subjected, to crave for ampler thought and fresher feeling, and to demand greater freedom both in matter and in style. Hence the appearance of new elements in the verse of the second half

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of the century. Here and there in it emotional chords were struck suggesting the awakening of passions which had long slumbered. Among men of the younger generation especially there were some at least who, in their impatience of the artifices of a town life and its modish literature, turned to nature for their inspiration and found the untainted air of wood and field inexpressibly stimulating after the stifling atmosphere of the fashionable rout. The stronger genius of the despised Elizabethans also began to lay its spell upon them; the *naïveté* of the old ballads made a potent appeal to ears that were tiring of the prim regularity and epigrammatic see-saw of current verse; while concurrently a new fund of interest was opened up for them in the re-discovered world of medieval chivalry and Gothic romance. All these influences were productive of changes in the matter and spirit of poetry, and such changes were accompanied by equally significant changes in form. A tendency toward the simplification of style set in, though for the present it did not go very far. The supremacy of the Classic couplet was attacked; blank verse, the Spenserian stanza, ballad stanzas, irregular metres of various kinds, the loosely rhythmical prose of Macpherson's "Ossian"—the increasing popularity of such innovations as these was an unmistakable sign that the reign of the Popean couplet was at length drawing toward its close. Thus in studying the poetry of the

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period now under review we have to recognize, on the one side, the continuance of the Augustan tradition, and on the other the efforts of various writers to break away from that tradition and to express a new spirit under new forms.

Now in this age of transition Goldsmith as a theorist and as a critic of poetry took his place beside Johnson in the ranks of the Conservatives. In all his ideals and criteria of literature he was indeed one of the stoutest supporters of what was still the orthodox creed. For him, as for Johnson, the acknowledged masters of the Classic school had shown completely and finally what English literature ought to be. To them he turned for the absolute realization of artistic perfection. "Some have looked back upon the writers of the time of Elizabeth," he says, in "The Bee," with clear reference to the growing enthusiasm for the older masters of poetry, "as the true standard for future imitation; others have descended to the reign of James I, and others still lower to that of Charles II. Were I to be permitted to offer an opinion on this subject, I should readily give my vote for the reign of Queen Anne, or some years before that period. It was then that taste was united with genius, and as before our writers charmed with their strength of thinking so then they pleased with strength and grace united."¹ These sentences may fairly be taken as a confession of faith. In all

¹ Cp. his remarks on the degeneration of the language of poetry since the times of Dryden, Pope, and Addison, in his "Life of Dr Parnell."

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his critical principles Goldsmith was a consistent Classicist, and it was in accordance with these principles that his two great poems were written.

Let us consider first the question of form. Here Goldsmith's conservatism is of course very obvious. For him the Classic couplet was the one proper vehicle for the highest kind of poetry, that highest kind being, I need hardly say, the didactic. He did not in the least disguise his antipathy to the metrical experiments in which some of his contemporaries thought fit to indulge, and particularly to blank verse, which, oddly enough as it may seem to us, he denounced as pedantic and inharmonious, and the introduction of which into didactic poetry (he was doubtless thinking of such writers as Akenside and Armstrong) he regarded as "likely to bring that species of composition into disrepute, for which the English are deservedly famous."¹ That his own poems are therefore written in the regular Augustan couplet is only what we should expect. Were this the place to enter into the refinements of technical criticism we might indeed pause to inquire how far and in what ways his versification exhibits a tendency toward the slackening of the established rules, and what significance may be attached to the fact that, as Professor Dowden has pointed out, he seems to have conceived his verse rather in

¹ Cp. the references to blank verse in the Dedication to "The Traveller," for which see *post*, p. 102.

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paragraphs than, as Pope had done, in separate couplets. But here we must ignore such questions of detail and pass at once to a more important formal feature of Goldsmith's poetic work—I mean the stereotyped conventionalism by which much of his diction is characterized and which is one of his many points of connexion with the Augustan school. For a writer whose prose is generally so simple and unaffected his poetic vocabulary is often highly Latinized; he is frequently stilted and pompous; he indulges freely in the current taste for abstractions and personifications; again and again he substitutes for the direct and natural expression, which must surely have come spontaneously to him, some grandiose circumlocution which links him at once to those practitioners in the vicious poetic style of his century against whom the wrath of Wordsworth was presently to be kindled. We know the general character of what was then accepted as the hieratic dialect of poetry. You made what you had to say poetical, not by touching it with imagination or heightening it by feeling, but by expressing it in some florid and pretentious way. The country boy was turned into a swain and the country girl into a nymph (these being the only forms in which they would be presentable in a drawing-room); the nightingale did not sing, he was an "Attic warbler" who "poured his throat"; to fish was to "angle for the finny prey"; poultry were "household feathery people"; cattle resting

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beneath the trees were described as "ruminating in the contiguous shade"; the homely wish "God rest his soul" was inflated into "Eternal blessings on his shade attend." Now, as the reader will see for himself, Goldsmith's lapses into this kind of "inane phraseology" (as Wordsworth called it) are very numerous, and as the poems themselves will soon be before us, we need not attempt to specify them in detail. But as an illustration we may take the line from "The Deserted Village,"

No cheerful murmurs fluctuate in the gale,

and recall what Matthew Arnold remarked, quite justly, of it: "There is exactly the poetic diction of our prose century—rhetorical, ornate, and poetically quite false." Or, for an example on a larger scale, I may refer to the passage in the earlier poem beginning:

Could nature's bounty satisfy the breast.

How better could we describe this than by recourse to Arnold's admirably chosen words? It is just the sort of thing—no better, if no worse—that one finds in many a page of the minor poetry of Goldsmith's time; and Goldsmith, who was so true a poet, wrote it, and doubtless thought it as good as any sustained passage that came from his pen.

When we turn from the form to the matter of "The Traveller" and "The Deserted Village" we observe again the ascendancy

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of Augustan influences. Both poems are statedly philosophical and didactic; they are both written around definite theses, which they expound, discuss, and illustrate; the primary appeal of both is to the intellect; they address the imagination and the feelings only, as it were, accidentally and by the way. "The Traveller" contains, according to programme, a "prospect of society"; it is in fact a versified pamphlet on the physical, social, and political conditions of various European nations; and its ostensible purpose is to establish the proposition that, when all things are taken into account and advantages and disadvantages are duly tabulated and balanced, though perfect felicity is nowhere to be found, one country offers to a wise man as good a chance of happiness as another. And as "The Traveller" is thus an essay in verse on the characteristics of the different nations, so "The Deserted Village"—which is again expressly didactic, though far less consistently so—is an essay in verse upon an abuse which bulked very large in Goldsmith's mind—the rapid growth of luxury among the wealthy classes and the numerous and far-reaching evils which, as he read the signs of the times, this must necessarily entail. An economic doctrine thus forms the backbone of his poem, and to its underlying philosophic argument everything else in it—its pictures, its sketches of character, its tender sentiment—was, nominally at least, subordinate. It was to such argument,

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and not to these digressive matters, as the dedication to Sir Joshua Reynolds shows, that Goldsmith was most solicitous to direct the reader's attention. It was primarily as a publicist—as the exponent of a particular view of the problem of depopulation—that the poet of Sweet Auburn challenged the judgment of his critics.

Without pushing our analysis farther we can therefore see that in certain important respects Goldsmith's two poems belong very distinctly to the outgoing Augustan age, and it is with perfect justice that they have been described by one of his critics as "the last really great work of the artificial-conventional school of verse." Yet to rest in the results to which our inquiry has thus led would be, as every lover of Goldsmith must feel, not only to miss some of the qualities which give to these poems their peculiar and winning charm, but also to pass over those elements in them which make them historically so interesting. For while on the one hand they mark their author as a disciple of Pope, on the other they contain much that connects them, not with that accomplished master and his followers, but with the poet of the "Elegy," with Cowper, and even with Wordsworth. Why was this? The answer has already been suggested. It was simply because, as we have said, Goldsmith projected himself into everything that he wrote. His critical theories were one thing; his poetic temperament was another; and happily for

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us, his temperament often proved too strong for his theories. He might follow in the beaten track of the Augustans; he might proclaim their tenets and fashion his own work upon their model; he might adopt the forms which they had established and use their vocabulary; yet, instinct as it was with his own personality, his verse could not fail to be moulded and coloured by powerful influences altogether alien to theirs. And if this is true of the two poems taken together, it is, as even the least critical reader will recognize, pre-eminently true of "The Deserted Village": a fact which suggests that, like Gray, Goldsmith, however unconsciously, was gradually outgrowing his theoretic Classicism. It is significant that Johnson always preferred "The Traveller" to its far fresher and more original companion.

It will, I think, be of help to us in our study of Goldsmith to consider a little carefully a few of the more important points at which he breaks with the strict Augustan tradition.

In the first place, though his poems are statedly didactic they are by no means baldly so. The thesis is set out; the ethical and economic views of the writer are expounded; but to some extent in "The Traveller," and very conspicuously in "The Deserted Village," the text is continually made an excuse for digressions of a highly poetic character. The argument is a thread upon which Goldsmith strings his reminiscences and reflections, and these are marked by the essentially romantic

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quality of strong individual feeling, or intense subjectivity. They are indeed introduced professedly to illustrate the philosophy, but from time to time the poet forgets the philosophy and devotes himself whole-heartedly to his illustrations. The delicately finished descriptions of Auburn in the days of its prosperity and afterward in its decay, the dainty vignettes of nature, the half-humorous, half-pathetic, full-length studies of the village priest and the schoolmaster, are all elaborated to an extent wholly in excess of the actual demands of the argument. Their highly wrought detail indeed really detracts attention from the argument and thus rather clogs than furthers the course of the poet's thought; it will be noted, for instance, that his interest in Paddy Byrne takes him so far out of his prescribed way that, having completed his picture, he has some difficulty in fitting it into his theme. Goldsmith sat down to write an essay in verse (for this, according to his principles, was the only kind of work worthy of a poet's ambition), with examples in support of his doctrines taken from what he had himself seen and known. The philosophy is there, but the examples have so overlaid it that to-day we think of these as the real substance of the poem, and of its thesis only as a sort of framework the chief service of which is to hold them together.

Directly connected with this marked subjectivity—this subordination of didactic intention to reminiscence and reflection—is the

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amount of feeling which both poems contain. Pope's age had been an age of hard and dry intelligence ; even in poetry, as in religion, it had shown its profound distrust of the emotions. The gradual reinstatement of the emotions, with the wave of quickening spirituality which now began to sweep through English life, was one great feature of the second half of the eighteenth century, and thus sensibility became a characteristic note, and by and by a far too strident note, in the literature of the new time. Goldsmith disliked sentimentalism, but he was none the less deeply affected by its influences. The Traveller, wandering through Europe, and watching the hardy Switzer at his toil and the dance of the sprightly French peasantry beside the Loire, while his own heart is filled and his sight dimmed with tender thoughts of home and kindred beyond the sea, is almost a type of that new Man of Feeling whose pensive musings and gentle melancholy, often deliberately cultivated for the exquisite pleasure which it afforded, were already beginning to touch European literature with the softening sense of tears. "The Deserted Village" is tremulous with the pathos of idealized memories and retrospective regret. Both poems are indeed warm with what Swinburne, in writing of them, called "a priceless and adorable power of sweet human emotion." There is nothing in either of them to suggest, save by complete contrast, the cold, glittering intellectuality and often cynical worldliness of the Augustans ;

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there is much in both to tell us that the heart is once more asserting its right to be heard, and that men are beginning to drink freely again from the well-springs of the emotional life.

Thirdly, we have to note Goldsmith's treatment of nature and rural existence. Augustan literature had been a literature of the town, and narrowly metropolitan in theme, spirit, and sympathy. It had concerned itself almost exclusively with the things which interested people in the drawing-room and the coffee-house, and where it had dealt with nature at all, it was, with rare exceptions, not of the real English fields and lanes and country-folk that it discoursed, but of a conventional Arcadia which existed only in the fancy of pastoral poets and of imaginary shepherds and shepherdesses who spent their time in piping, talking philosophy, or discussing the metaphysics of love. But as the century advanced a change in this respect as well came over the spirit of our literature. That change was the result of many causes, social and political no less than literary, and it was productive of many effects. But into the larger questions of origin and influence we need not now enter. It is enough for us to remember that so far as our poetry was concerned it was marked by a growing feeling for nature, the picturesque, and the simplicities of rustic life. Impatient of the cramping conventions of an artificial civilization, the poets of the new age turned from the city streets through which Gay had wandered

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in search of inspiration, from Belinda at her toilet, and from the dryads and hamadryads whom Pope had discovered in the classic recesses of Windsor Forest, to dwell, as Thomson had already done, upon the familiar aspects of the successive seasons, to watch with Collins the quiet evening draw its "gradual dusky veil" over the darkening landscape, or to meditate with Gray in the twilight stillness of a village churchyard "far from the madding world's ignoble strife."

In Goldsmith's poetry this rising love of nature and rural simplicity is also distinctly felt. It is true, of course, that it is expressed by him within certain well-marked limitations. Though he lingers amid some of the finest scenery in Europe his eye is upon man and society rather than upon their natural surroundings. His handling of nature generally in "The Traveller" is almost entirely conventional. In particular, we see that he was wholly of the outgoing age in his attitude toward mountains, to which the Augustans had objected (as they had objected to older English poetry and architecture) as rude and 'Gothic.'¹ He could realize that the loud torrent and the whirlwind's roar might bind the native Switzer more closely to his home; but for his part he thought of the Alps very much as Addison had thought of them in the preceding generation, and, unlike Gray, he nowhere hints that he had been impressed by

¹ Cp. my "Gray and His Poetry," pp. 23-29.

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their majesty and picturesqueness. But in "The Deserted Village"—largely because the landscape is of a more domestic kind—the treatment of nature is different. That landscape is still rather conventional and generalized; it is still entirely humanized; the poet, we feel throughout, is even now mainly interested in his people. But here, none the less, we have a bit of the genuine English country.¹ Goldsmith's eye had been upon his subject. The church upon the hill, the brook, the mill, the hawthorn tree, all belong, not to a poetic Arcadia, but to the actual world; while the people who live among them are not shepherds and shepherdesses, but human beings with whom Goldsmith too had lived. This homely feeling for real nature and real country-folk must be considered in contrast with the long-standing pastoral tradition in poetry or its full significance will not be understood.

This leads us to one other point. What is it in the thought and spirit of these two poems which specially appeals to us when we read them to-day? Surely their broad and deep humanity, their pervading sympathy with all aspects of life, and most of all their sympathy with the humble and the obscure. In "The Traveller" this humanitarianism is revealed

¹ I say English designedly, because though Auburn may safely be identified with Lissay it is transformed under the poet's hands into a typical English village set in a typical English landscape. As Masson has pointed out, it is a singular feature of Goldsmith's work that, Irish as he was by birth, education, and temper, "he discharged all special Irish colour" out of his reminiscences. In "The Deserted Village," as again in "The Vicar of Wakefield," "the ideal air in which his phantasies are hung is an English air."

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in the writer's cosmopolitan outlook. In "The Deserted Village" it is expressed even more distinctly under another form. For in this poem he joins forces with those among his contemporaries who consciously or unconsciously were helping to break down the aristocratic limitations within which poetry had long been confined. Like Gray he found a congenial theme for verse in phases of human existence from which the Augustans would have turned with chilly indifference or open contempt; like Gray he discovered a rich source of inspiration in "the short and simple annals of the poor."

It is so important for the student of Goldsmith that he should be prepared to consider his poetry from the historical as well as from the personal point of view that, long as this introduction has been, its length is, I think, justified by its purpose. Without further preliminaries we will now turn to the first of the two poems under discussion :

THE TRAVELLER

OR, A PROSPECT OF SOCIETY

DEDICATION

To the Rev. Henry Goldsmith

Dear Sir,—

I am sensible that the friendship between us can acquire no new force from the ceremonies of a dedication; and perhaps it demands an excuse thus to prefix your name to my attempts, which you decline

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giving with your own. But as a part of this poem was formerly written to you from Switzerland, the whole can now with propriety be only inscribed to you. It will also throw a light upon many parts of it, when the reader understands that it is addressed to a man who, despising fame and fortune, has retired early to happiness and obscurity, with an income of forty pounds a year.

I now perceive, my dear brother, the wisdom of your humble choice. You have entered upon a sacred office, where the harvest is great, and the labourers are but few, while you have left the field of ambition, where the labourers are many and the harvests not worth carrying away. But of all kinds of ambition,—what from the refinement of the times, from different systems of criticism, and from the divisions of party,—that which pursues poetical fame is the wildest.

Poetry makes a principal amusement among unpolished nations; but in a country verging to the extremes of refinement, Painting and Music come in for a share. As these offer the feeble mind a less laborious entertainment, they at first rival Poetry, and at length supplant her: they engross all that favour once shown to her; and though but younger sisters, seize upon the elder's birthright.

Yet, however this art may be neglected by the powerful, it is still in greater dangers from the mistaken efforts of the learned to improve it. What criticisms have we not heard of late in favour of blank verses and Pindaric odes, choruses, anapests, and iambics, alliterative care and happy negligence! Every absurdity has now a champion to defend it, and as he is generally much in the wrong, so he has always much to say—for error is ever talkative.

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But there is an enemy to this art still more dangerous ; I mean party. Party entirely distorts the judgment, and destroys the taste. When the mind is once infected with the disease, it can only find pleasure in what contributes to increase the distemper. Like the tiger, that seldom desists from pursuing man after having once preyed upon human flesh, the reader who has once gratified his appetite with calumny makes ever after the most agreeable feast upon murdered reputation. Such readers generally admire some half-witted thing who wants to be thought a bold man, having lost the character of a wise one. Him they dignify with the name of poet : his tawdry lampoons are called satires ; his turbulence is said to be his force, and his frenzy, fire.

What reception a poem may find, which has neither abuse, party, nor blank verse to support it, I cannot tell, nor am I solicitous to know. My aims are right. Without espousing the cause of any party, I have attempted to moderate the rage of all. I have endeavoured to show that there may be equal happiness in states that are differently governed from our own ; that every state has a particular principle of happiness, and that this principle in each may be carried to a mischievous excess. There are few can judge, better than yourself, how far these positions are illustrated in this poem.

I am, dear Sir,

Your most affectionate brother,

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow,
Or by the lazy Scheldt or wandering Po ;

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Or onward, where the rude Carinthian boor
Against the houseless stranger shuts the door ;
Or where Campania's plain forsaken lies,
A weary waste expanding to the skies ;
Where'er I roam, whatever realms to see,
My heart untravelled fondly turns to thee ;
Still to my brother turns, with ceaseless pain,
And drags at each remove a lengthening chain.

Eternal blessings crown my earliest friend,
And round his dwelling guardian saints attend !
Blest be that spot where cheerful guests retire
To pause from toil, and trim their evening fire :
Blest that abode where want and pain repair,
And every stranger finds a ready chair :
Blest be those feasts with simple plenty crowned,
Where all the ruddy family around
Laugh at the jests or pranks that never fail,
Or sigh with pity at some mournful tale ;
Or press the bashful stranger to his food,
And learn the luxury of doing good.

But me, not destined such delights to share,
My prime of life in wandering spent and care ;
Impelled, with steps unceasing, to pursue
Some fleeting good that mocks me with the view ;
That, like the circle bounding earth and skies,
Allures from far, yet, as I follow, flies ;
My fortune leads to traverse realms alone,
And find no spot of all the world my own.

Even now, where Alpine solitudes ascend,
I sit me down a pensive hour to spend ;
And placed on high above the storm's career,
Look downward where an hundred realms
appear ;
Lakes, forests, cities, plains extending wide,
The pomp of kings, the shepherd's humbler pride.

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

When thus Creation's charms around combine,
Amidst the store, should thankless pride repine ?
Say, should the philosophic mind disdain
That good which makes each humbler bosom
vain ?

Let school-taught pride dissemble all it can,
These little things are great to little man ;
And wiser he, whose sympathetic mind
Exults in all the good of all mankind.
Ye glittering towns, with wealth and splendour
crowned ;

Ye fields, where summer spreads profusion round ;
Ye lakes, whose vessels catch the busy gale ;
Ye bending swains, that dress the flowery vale ; *artef*
For me your tributary stores combine :
Creation's heir, the world, the world is mine !

As some lone miser visiting his store,
Bends at his treasure, counts, recounts it o'er ;
Hoards after hoards his rising raptures fill,
Yet still he sighs, for hoards are wanting still ;
Thus to my breast alternate passions rise,
Pleased with each good that Heaven to man
supplies :

Yet oft a sigh prevails, and sorrows fall,
To see the hoard of human bliss so small ;
And oft I wish amidst the scene to find
Some spot to real happiness consigned,
Where my worn soul, each wandering hope at rest,
May gather bliss to see my fellows blest.

But where to find that happiest spot below
Who can direct, when all pretend to know ?
The shuddering tenant of the frigid zone
Boldly proclaims that happiest spot his own ;
Extols the treasures of his stormy seas,
And his long nights of revelry and ease :

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The naked negro, panting at the line,
Boasts of his golden sands and palmy wine,
Basks in the glare, or stems the tepid wave,
And thanks his gods for all the good they gave.

Such is the patriot's boast where'er we roam ;
His first, best country ever is at home.
And yet, perhaps, if countries we compare,
And estimate the blessings which they share,
Though patriots flatter, still shall wisdom find
An equal portion dealt to all mankind ;
As different good, by art or nature given,
To different nations makes their blessings even.

Nature, a mother kind alike to all,
Still grants her bliss at labour's earnest call ;
With food as well the peasant is supplied
On Idra's cliff as Arno's shelvy side ;
And though the rocky-crested summits frown,
These rocks by custom turn to beds of down.
From art more various are the blessings sent—
Wealth, commerce, honour, liberty, content.
Yet these each other's power so strong contest,
That either seems destructive of the rest.
Where wealth and freedom reign, contentment
fails,

And honour sinks where commerce long prevails.
Hence every state, to one loved blessing prone,
Conforms and models life to that alone.
Each to the favourite happiness attends,
And spurns the plan that aims at other ends :
Till, carried to excess in each domain,
This favourite good begets peculiar pain.

But let us try these truths with closer eyes,
And trace them through the prospect as it lies :
Here for a while my proper cares resigned,
Here let me sit in sorrow for mankind ;

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Like yon neglected shrub at random cast,
That shades the steep, and sighs at every blast.

Far to the right, where Apennine ascends,
Bright as the summer, Italy extends :
Its uplands sloping deck the mountain's side,
Woods over woods in gay theatric pride ;
While oft some temple's mouldering tops between
With venerable grandeur mark the scene.

Could nature's bounty satisfy the breast,
The sons of Italy were surely blest.
Whatever fruits in different climes are found,
That proudly rise or humbly court the ground ;
Whatever blooms in torrid tracts appear,
Whose bright succession decks the varied year ;
Whatever sweets salute the northern sky
With vernal lives, that blossom but to die ;
These, here disporting, own the kindred soil,
Nor ask luxuriance from the planter's toil ;
While sea-born gales their gelid wings expand
To winnow fragrance round the smiling land.

But small the bliss that sense alone bestows,
And sensual bliss is all the nation knows.
In florid beauty groves and fields appear ;
Man seems the only growth that dwindles here.
Contrasted faults through all his manners reign :
Though poor, luxurious ; though submissive, vain ;
Though grave, yet trifling ; zealous, yet untrue ;
And even in penance planning sins anew.
All evils here contaminate the mind
That opulence departed leaves behind ;
For wealth was theirs, not far removed the date,
When commerce proudly flourished through the
state ;

At her command the palace learned to rise,
Again the long-fallen column sought the skies,

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The canvas glowed, beyond e'en nature warm,
The pregnant quarry teemed with human form
Till, more unsteady than the southern gale,
Commerce on other shores displayed her sail ;
While nought remained of all that riches gave,
But towns unmanned, and lords without a slave :
And late the nation found with fruitless skill
Its former strength was but plethoric ill.

Yet still the loss of wealth is here supplied
By arts, the splendid wrecks of former pride ;
From these the feeble heart and long-fallen mind
An easy compensation seem to find.
Here may be seen, in bloodless pomp arrayed,
The pasteboard triumph and the cavalcade,
Processions formed for piety and love,
A mistress or a saint in every grove.
By sports like these are all their cares beguiled ;
The sports of children satisfy the child.
Each nobler aim, repressed by long control,
Now sinks at last, or feebly mans the soul ;
While low delights, succeeding fast behind,
In happier meanness occupy the mind :
As in those domes where Cæsars once bore sway,
Defaced by time, and tottering in decay,
There in the ruin, heedless of the dead,
The shelter-seeking peasant builds his shed ;
And, wondering man could want the larger pile,
Exults, and owns his cottage with a smile.

My soul, turn from them, turn we to survey
Where rougher climes a nobler race display,
Where the bleak Swiss their stormy mansion
tread,
And force a churlish soil for scanty bread.
No product here the barren hills afford
But man and steel, the soldier and his sword ;

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No vernal blooms their torpid rocks array,
But winter lingering chills the lap of May ;
No zephyr fondly sues the mountain's breast,
But meteors glare, and stormy glooms invest.

Yet still, even here content can spread a charm,
Redress the clime, and all its rage disarm.
Though poor the peasant's hut, his feasts though
small,

He sees his little lot the lot of all ;
Sees no contiguous palace rear its head
To shame the meanness of his humble shed ;
No costly lord the sumptuous banquet deal
To make him loathe his vegetable meal ;
But calm, and bred in ignorance and toil,
Each wish contracting fits him to the soil.
Cheerful at morn he wakes from short repose,
Breasts the keen air, and carols as he goes ;
With patient angle trolls the finny deep ;
Or drives his venturous ploughshare to the steep ;
Or seeks the den, where snow-tracks mark the way,
And drags the struggling savage¹ into day.
At night returning, every labour sped,
He sits him down the monarch of a shed ;
Smiles by his cheerful fire, and round surveys
His children's looks, that brighten at the blaze ;
While his loved partner, boastful of her hoard,
Displays her cleanly platter on the board :
And haply too some pilgrim, thither led,
With many a tale repays the nightly bed.

Thus every good his native wilds impart,
Imprints the patriot passion on his heart :
And e'en those ills that round his mansion rise
Enhance the bliss his scanty fund supplies.

¹ That is, savage animal. The word had not yet been limited by specialized application to human beings.

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Dear is that shed to which his soul conforms,
And dear that hill which lifts him to the storms ;
And as a child, when scaring sounds molest,
Clings close and closer to the mother's breast,
So the loud torrent and the whirlwind's roar
But bind him to his native mountains more.

Such are the charms to barren states assigned ;
Their wants but few, their wishes all confined.
Yet let them only share the praises due :
If few their wants, their pleasures are but few ;
For every want that stimulates the breast
Becomes a source of pleasure when redrest.
Hence from such lands each pleasing science flies
That first excites desire, and then supplies ;
Unknown to them, when sensual pleasures cloy,
To fill the languid pause with finer joy ;
Unknown those powers that raise the soul to flame,
Catch every nerve and vibrate through the frame.
Their level life is but a smouldering fire,
Unquenched by want, unfanned by strong desire ;
Unfit for raptures, or, if raptures cheer
On some high festival of once a year,
In wild excess the vulgar breast takes fire,
Till, buried in debauch, the bliss expire.

But not their joys alone thus coarsely flow :
Their morals, like their pleasures, are but low ;
For, as refinement stops, from sire to son
Unaltered, unimproved, the manners run,
And love's and friendship's finely pointed dart
Fall blunted from each indurated heart.
Some sterner virtues o'er the mountain's breast
May sit, like falcons cowering on the nest ;
But all the gentler morals, such as play
Through life's more cultured walks, and charm
the way,

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These, far dispersed, on timorous pinions fly,
To sport and flutter in a kinder sky.

To kinder skies, where gentler manners reign,
I turn ; and France displays her bright domain.
Gay, sprightly land of mirth and social ease,
Pleased with thyself, whom all the world can
please,

How often have I led thy sportive choir,¹
With tuneless pipe beside the murmuring Loire!
Where shading elms along the margin grew,
And freshened from the wave the zephyr flew ;
And haply, though my harsh touch, faltering
still,

But mocked all tune, and marred the dancer's
skill,

Yet would the village praise my wondrous power,
And dance, forgetful of the noon-tide hour.

Alike all ages. Dames of ancient days
Have led their children through the mirthful maze,
And the gray grandsire, skilled in gestic lore,
Has frisked beneath the burden of threescore.

So blessed a life these thoughtless realms display ;

Thus idly busy rolls their world away.

Theirs are those arts that mind to mind endear,
For honour forms the social temper here :

Honour, that praise which real merit gains,
Or even imaginary worth obtains,

Here passes current : paid from hand to hand,
It shifts in splendid traffic round the land :

From courts to camps, to cottages, it strays,
And all are taught an avarice of praise.

They please, are pleased ; they give to get esteem ;
Till, seeming blessed, they grow to what they seem.

¹ Cp. "The Vicar of Wakefield," chap. xx.

AND THEIR POETRY

But while this softer art their bliss supplies,
It gives their follies room to rise ;
For praise too dearly loved, or warmly sought,
Enfeebles all internal strength of thought,
And the weak soul within itself unblest,
Leans for all pleasure on another's breast.
Hence ostentation here, with tawdry art,
Pants for the vulgar praise which fools impart ;
Here vanity assumes her pert grimace,
And trims her robes of frieze with copper lace ;
Here beggar pride defrauds her daily cheer,
To boast one splendid banquet once a year ;
The mind still turns where shifting fashion
draws,
Nor weighs the solid worth of self-applause.

To men of other minds my fancy flies,
Embosomed in the deep where Holland lies.
Methinks her patient sons before me stand,
Where the broad ocean leans against the land ;
And, sedulous to stop the coming tide,
Lift the tall rampire's artificial pride.
Onward, methinks, and diligently slow,
The firm connected bulwark seems to grow ;
Spreads its long arms amidst the watery roar,
Scoops out an empire, and usurps the shore.
While the pent ocean, rising o'er the pile,
Sees an amphibious world beneath him smile ;
The slow canal, the yellow blossomed vale,
The willow-tufted bank, the gliding sail,
The crowded mart, the cultivated plain,—
A new creation rescued from his reign.

¹ Thus while around the wave-subjected soil
Impels the native to repeated toil,

¹ For the political views set forth in this passage *cp.* "The Vicar of Wakefield," chap. xix.

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

Industrious habits in each bosom reign,
And industry begets a love of gain.
Hence all the good from opulence that springs,
With all those ills superfluous treasure brings,
Are here displayed. There much loved wealth
imparts

Convenience, plenty, elegance, and arts ;
But view them closer, craft and fraud appear,
E'en liberty itself is bartered here.
At gold's superior charms all freedom flies ;
The needy sell it, and the rich man buys ;
A land of tyrants, and a den of slaves,
Here wretches seek dishonourable graves,
And calmly bent, to servitude conform,
Dull as their lakes that slumber in the storm.
Heavens ! how unlike their Belgic sires of old !
Rough, poor, content, ungovernably bold,
War in each breast, and freedom on each brow :
How much unlike the sons of Britain now !

Fired at the sound, my genius spreads her wing,
And flies where Britain courts the western spring ;
Where lawns extend that scorn Arcadian pride,
And brighter streams than famed Hydaspes¹ glide.
There all around the gentlest breezes stray ;
There gentle music melts on every spray ;
Creation's mildest charms are there combined,
Extremes are only in the master's mind !
Stern o'er each bosom reason holds her state,
With daring aims irregularly great ;
Pride in their port, defiance in their eye,
I see the lords of human kind pass by ;
Intent on high designs, a thoughtful band,
By forms unfashioned, fresh from nature's hand,

¹ Now the Jhelum, in the Punjab, India. Horace calls it "fabulosus" ("Odes," I, xxii, 7), with reference to the marvellous stories which were told of it.

AND THEIR POETRY

Fierce in their native hardiness of soul,
True to imagined right, above control,
While even the peasant boasts these rights to scan,
And learns to venerate himself as man.

Thine, Freedom, thine the blessings pictured
here ;

Thine are those charms that dazzle and endear
Too blessed, indeed, were such without alloy !
But fostered even by freedom ills annoy :
That independence Britons prize too high
Keeps man from man, and breaks the social tie ;
The self-dependent lordlings stand alone,
All claims that bind and sweeten life unknown.
Here, by the bonds of nature feebly held,
Minds combat minds, repelling and repelled ;
Ferments arise, imprisoned factions roar,
Repressed ambition struggles round her shore,
Till, overwrought, the general system feels
Its motions stop, or frenzy fire the wheels.

Nor this the worst. As nature's ties decay,
As duty, love, and honour fail to sway,
Fictitious bonds, the bonds of wealth and law,
Still gather strength, and force unwilling awe.
Hence all obedience bows to these alone,
And talent sinks, and merit weeps unknown :
Till time may come, when, stripped of all her
charms,

The land of scholars and the nurse of arms,
Where noble stems transmit the patriot flame,
Where kings have toiled and poets wrote for fame,
One sink of level avarice shall lie,
And scholars, soldiers, kings, unhonoured die.

Yet think not, thus when Freedom's ills I state,
I mean to flatter kings, or court the great.
Ye powers of truth that bid my soul aspire,

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

Far from my bosom drive the low desire !
And thou, fair Freedom, taught alike to feel
The rabble's rage and tyrant's angry steel ;
Thou transitory flower, alike undone
By proud contempt or favour's fostering sun,
Still may thy blooms the changeful clime endure !
I only would repress them to secure :
For just experience tells, in every soil,
That those who think must govern those that
toil ;

And all that freedom's highest aims can reach
Is but to lay proportioned loads on each.
Hence, should one order disproportioned grow,
Its double weight must ruin all below.

O then how blind to all that truth requires,
Who think it freedom when a part aspires !
Calm is my soul, nor apt to rise in arms,
Except when fast approaching danger warms ;
But when contending chiefs blockade the throne,
Contracting regal power to stretch their own,
When I behold a factious band agree
To call it freedom when themselves are free ;
Each wanton judge new penal statutes draw,¹
Laws grind the poor, and rich men rule the law,
The wealth of climes where savage nations roam
Pillaged from slaves to purchase slaves at home ;
Fear, pity, justice, indignation start,
Tear off reserve, and bare my swelling heart ;
Till half a patriot, half a coward grown,
I fly from petty tyrants to the throne.

Yes, brother, curse with me that baleful hour
When first ambition struck at regal power ;
And thus polluting honour in its source,
Gave wealth to sway the mind with double force.

¹ *Cp.* "The Vicar of Wakefield," chap. xix.

AND THEIR POETRY

Have we not seen, round Britain's peopled shore,
Her useful sons exchanged for useless ore?
Seen all her triumphs but destruction haste,
Like flaring tapers brightening as they waste?
Seen opulence, her grandeur to maintain,
Lead stern depopulation in her train,
And over fields where scattered hamlets rose
In barren solitary pomp repose?
Have we not seen at pleasure's lordly call
The smiling long-frequented village fall?
Beheld the duteous son, the sire decayed,
The modest matron, and the blushing maid,
Forced from their homes, a melancholy train,
To traverse climes beyond the western main;
Where wild Oswego spreads her swamps around,
And Niagara¹ stuns with thundering sound?

Even now, perhaps, as there some pilgrim strays
Through tangled forests and through dangerous
ways,

Where beasts with man divided empire claim,
And the brown Indian marks with murderous aim;
There, while above the giddy tempest flies,
And all around distressful yells arise,
The pensive exile, bending with his woe,
To stop too fearful, and too faint to go,
Casts a long look where England's glories shine,
And bids his bosom sympathize with mine.

Vain, very vain, my weary search to find
That bliss which only centres in the mind.
Why have I strayed from pleasure and repose,
To seek a good each government bestows?
In every government, though terrors reign,
Though tyrant kings or tyrant laws restrain,

¹ The accentuation shows that Goldsmith was not very familiar with this name.

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

How small, of all that human hearts endure,
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure !
Still to ourselves in every place consigned,
Our own felicity we make or find :
With secret course, which no loud storms annoy,
Glides the smooth current of domestic joy.
The lifted axe, the agonizing wheel,
Luke's iron crown,¹ and Damiens' bed of steel,²
To men remote from power but rarely known,
Leave reason, faith, and conscience all our own.³

Though most of what it seems necessary to say in the way of general criticism and commentary about the foregoing poem has been said in preceding pages, one more special remark has now to be added. As the closing passage shows, its underlying philosophy has much in common with that of "The Vanity of Human Wishes." The moral in each case is, in fact, much the same : the impossibility of finding any lot in life which will secure unalloyed satisfaction and the power of the wise man to make the happiness he cannot find ; and this moral, as we have just seen, is here formulated with Johnson's help. But while similar in explicit teaching the poems differ in two important respects. In the first place

¹ An error. Luke and George Dosa were two brothers who "headed a revolt against the Hungarian nobles, at the opening of the sixteenth century," but "though both were tortured, the special horror of the red-hot crown was inflicted upon George." (Forster, Book III, chap. x.)

² The rack. Damiens was a half-crazy valet who attempted the life of Louis XV in 1757.

³ We have Johnson's authority that his own contributions to "The Traveller" consisted of line 420 ("To stop too fearful, and too faint to go"), the six lines from "How small, of all that human hearts endure," to "domestic joy," and the concluding couplet. See Boswell, p. 173.

AND THEIR POETRY

they differ in spirit : the sanguine tone of the one being in striking contrast with the deep despondency of the other. Secondly, they differ even more markedly in the character of the illustrations with which the two writers respectively enforce their arguments. Johnson sets out to "survey mankind from China to Peru." What he really does is to survey mankind in history. Here and there he draws upon personal experience, but his examples are taken from the past. Goldsmith does not go back into the past, but straight out into life ; he points his moral by reference, not to the great persons he has read about, but to the common people he has seen—the masses of whom the dignified muse of History had scarcely begun to take account. The Swiss among their bleak mountains, hardy, rude, contented ; the sprightly French women leading their children out to the dance ; the slow, industrious Dutchman in his brown canal-boat—he had mingled with them all, he had observed them all for himself, and they all belonged to the stuff of ordinary humanity. The influence of Goldsmith's essentially democratic spirit upon the quality of his work is thus very apparent ; he shows us poetry escaping both from the aristocratic limitations and the bookish traditions of Classicism to renew its vigour by absorbing once more the warm rich blood of common life.

We have seen that among the many evils which Goldsmith found to deplore in the social

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and political conditions of his own favoured land were those arising from the spread of the commercial spirit and the tyranny of wealth, and pre-eminent among them the depopulation of the villages and the ruin of the peasantry throughout the country. The theme upon which he had thus just touched in his comprehensive "prospect of society" provides the substance of his second poem. The trustworthiness of his data and the value of his economic theories it is scarcely worth while now to discuss; it is probable that he generalized over-hastily from insufficient evidence, and certain that, as Forster says, "his views were . . . less sound than poetical." As we do not now read "The Deserted Village" for its political economy these are matters of very small importance. Even if we admit that "Auburn bordered on Shakespeare's Forest of Arden" and that "the doctrines concerning agriculture and commercial prosperity were suited to that neighbourhood,"¹ we are still as deeply moved by the poet's just indignation against the selfish rich and his sympathy with the suffering poor. His philosophy may not carry conviction, but his poetry touches the heart.

¹ Dowden, in Ward's "English Poets," vol. iii, p. 371.

AND THEIR POETRY

THE DESERTED VILLAGE

DEDICATION

To Sir Joshua Reynolds

Dear Sir,—

I can have no expectations, in an address of this kind, either to add to your reputation or to establish my own. You can gain nothing from my admiration, as I am ignorant of that art in which you are said to excel ; and I may lose much by the severity of your judgment, as few have a juster taste in poetry than you. Setting interest therefore aside, to which I never paid much attention, I must be indulged at present in following my affections. The only dedication I ever made was to my brother, because I loved him better than most other men. He is since dead. Permit me to inscribe this poem to you.

How far you may be pleased with the versification and mere mechanical parts of this attempt, I do not pretend to inquire ; but I know you will object—and indeed several of our best and wisest friends concur in the opinion—that the depopulation it deplures is nowhere to be seen, and the disorders it laments are only to be found in the poet's own imagination. To this I can scarcely make any other answer than that I sincerely believe what I have written, that I have taken all possible pains in my country excursions for these four or five years past to be certain of what I allege, and that all my views and inquiries have led me to believe those miseries real which I here attempt to display. But this is not the place to enter into an inquiry whether the country be depopulating or not ; the discussion would take up much room, and I should prove myself, at best, an indifferent politician to tire

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

the reader with a long preface, when I want his unfatigued attention to a long poem.

In regretting the depopulation of the country, I inveigh against the increase of our luxuries; and here, also, I expect the shout of modern politicians against me. For twenty or thirty years past it has been the fashion to consider luxury as one of the greatest national advantages, and all the wisdom of antiquity, in that particular, as erroneous. Still, however, I must remain a professed ancient on that head, and continue to think those luxuries prejudicial to states, by which so many vices are introduced, and so many kingdoms have been undone. Indeed, so much has been poured out of late on the other side of the question, that merely for the sake of novelty and variety one would sometimes wish to be in the right.

I am, dear Sir,

Your sincere friend and ardent admirer,

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

Sweet Auburn! loveliest village of the plain,
Where health and plenty cheered the labouring
swain,
Where smiling spring its earliest visit paid,
And parting summer's lingering blooms delayed:
Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,
Seats of my youth, when every sport could please,
How often have I loitered o'er thy green,
Where humble happiness endeared each scene!
How often have I paused on every charm,
The sheltered cot, the cultivated farm,
The never-failing brook, the busy mill,
The decent church that topped the neighbouring
hill,

AND THEIR POETRY

The hawthorn bush, with seats beneath the shade,
For talking age and whispering lovers made !
How often have I blessed the coming day,
When toil remitting lent its turn to play,
And all the village train, from labour free,
Led up their sports beneath the spreading tree ;
While many a pastime circled in the shade,
The young contending as the old surveyed ;
And many a gambol frolicked o'er the ground,
And sleights of art and feats of strength went
round ;

And still, as each repeated pleasure tired,
Succeeding sports the mirthful band inspired ;
The dancing pair that simply sought renown
By holding out to tire each other down ;
The swain mistrustless of his smutted face,
While secret laughter tittered round the place ;
The bashful virgin's sidelong looks of love,
The matron's glance that would those looks
reprove.

These were thy charms, sweet village ! sports
like these,

With sweet succession, taught even toil to please ;
These round thy bowers their cheerful influence
shed :

These were thy charms—but all these charms are
fled. ✓

Sweet smiling village, loveliest of the lawn,
Thy sports are fled, and all thy charms with-
drawn ;

Amidst thy bowers the tyrant's hand is seen,
And desolation saddens all thy green :
One only master grasps the whole domain,
And half a tillage stints thy smiling plain.
No more thy glassy brook reflects the day,

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

But, choked with sedges, works its weedy way ;
Along thy glades, a solitary guest,
The hollow-sounding bittern guards its nest ;
Amidst thy desert walks the lapwing flies,
And tires their echoes with unvaried cries.
Sunk are thy bowers in shapeless ruin all,
And the long grass o'ertops the mouldering wall ;
And trembling, shrinking from the spoiler's hand,
Far, far away thy children leave the land.

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay :
Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade—
A breath can make them, as a breath has
made :

But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroyed, can never be supplied.

A time there was, ere England's griefs began,
When every rood of ground maintained its man ;
For him light labour spread her wholesome store,
Just gave what life required, but gave no more :
His best companions, innocence and health,
And his best riches, ignorance of wealth.

But times are altered ; trade's unfeeling train
Usurp the land and dispossess the swain ;
Along the lawn, where scattered hamlets rose,
Unwieldy wealth and cumbrous pomp repose,
And every want to opulence allied,
And every pang that folly pays to pride.
Those gentle hours that plenty bade to bloom,
Those calm desires that asked but little room,
Those healthful sports that graced the peaceful
scene,
Lived in each look, and brightened all the green ;
These, far departing, seek a kinder shore,
And rural mirth and manners are no more.

AND THEIR POETRY

Sweet Auburn! parent of the blissful hour,
Thy glades forlorn confess the tyrant's power.
Here, as I take my solitary rounds
Amidst thy tangling walks and ruined grounds,
And, many a year elapsed, return to view
Where once the cottage stood, the hawthorn grew,
Remembrance wakes with all her busy train,
Swells at my breast, and turns the past to pain.

In all my wanderings round this world of care;
In all my griefs—and God has given my share—
I still had hopes, my latest hours to crown,
Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down ; •
To husband out life's taper at the close,
And keep the flame from wasting by repose.
I still had hopes, for pride attends us still,
Amidst the swains to show my book-learned skill,
Around my fire an evening group to draw,
And tell of all I felt, and all I saw ;
And as a hare whom hounds and horns pursue,
Pants to the place from whence at first he flew,
I still had hopes, my long vexations past,
Here to return—and die at home at last.

O blessed retirement, friend to life's decline,
Retreats from care, that never must be mine,
How happy he who crowns in shades like these
A youth of labour with an age of ease ;
Who quits a world where strong temptations try
And, since 'tis hard to combat, learns to fly !
For him no wretches, born to work and weep,
Explore the mine, or tempt the dangerous deep ;
No surly porter stands in guilty state,
To spurn imploring famine from the gate ;
But on he moves to meet his latter end,
Angels around befriending virtue's friend ;
Bends to the grave with unperceived decay,

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

While resignation gently slopes the way ;
And, all his prospects brightening to the last,
His heaven commences ere the world be past !

Sweet was the sound, when oft at evening's
close,

Up yonder hill the village murmur rose.
There, as I passed with careless steps and slow,
The mingling notes came softened from below ;
The swain responsive as the milk-maid sung,
The sober herd that lowed to meet their young,
The noisy geese that gabbled o'er the pool,
The playful children just let loose from school,
The watch-dog's voice that bayed the whispering
wind,

And the loud laugh that spoke the vacant mind ;—
These all in sweet confusion sought the shade,
And filled each pause the nightingale had made.

But now the sounds of population fail,
No cheerful murmurs fluctuate in the gale,
No busy steps the grass-grown footway tread,
For all the bloomy flush of life is fled.

All but yon widowed, solitary thing,
That feebly bends beside the plashy spring :
She, wretched matron, forced in age, for bread,
To strip the brook with mantling cresses spread,
To pick her wintry fagot from the thorn,
To seek her nightly shed, and weep till morn ;
She only left of all the harmless train,
The sad historian of the pensive plain !

Near yonder copse, where once the garden
smiled,

And still where many a garden flower grows wild ;
There, where a few torn shrubs the place disclose,
✓ The village preacher's modest mansion rose.
A man he was to all the country dear,

AND THEIR POETRY

And passing rich with forty pounds a year ; ✓
Remote from towns he ran his godly race,
Nor e'er had changed, nor wished to change his place ;

Unpractised he to fawn, or seek for power,
By doctrines fashioned to the varying hour ;
Far other aims his heart had learned to prize,
More skilled to raise the wretched than to rise.
His house was known to all the vagrant train ;
He chid their wanderings but relieved their pain ;

The long-remembered beggar was his guest,
Whose beard descending swept his aged breast ;
The ruined spendthrift, now no longer proud,
Claimed kindred there, and had his claims allowed ;
The broken soldier kindly bade to stay,
Sat by his fire, and talked the night away,
Wept o'er his wounds, or, tales of sorrow done,
Shouldered his crutch and showed how fields were won.

Pleased with his guests, the good man learned to glow,
And quite forgot their vices in their woe ;
Careless their merits or their faults to scan, ✓
His pity gave ere charity began. ✓

Thus to relieve the wretched was his pride,
And e'en his failings leaned to virtue's side ;
But in his duty prompt at every call,
He watched and wept, he prayed and felt for all ;
And, as a bird each fond endearment tries
To tempt its new-fledged offspring to the skies,
He tried each art, reproved each dull delay,
Allured to brighter worlds, and led the way.

Beside the bed where parting life was laid,
And sorrow, guilt, and pain by turns dismayed,

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

The reverend champion stood. At his control
Despair and anguish fled the struggling soul ;
Comfort came down the trembling wretch to raise,
And his last faltering accents whispered praise.

At church, with meek and unaffected grace,
His looks adorned the venerable place ;
Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,
And fools, who came to scoff, remained to pray.
The service past, around the pious man,
With steady zeal, each honest rustic ran ;
Even children followed with endearing wile,
And plucked his gown to share the good man's
smile.

His ready smile a parent's warmth expressed,
Their welfare pleased him, and their cares dis-
tressed ;

To them his heart, his love, his griefs were given,
But all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven.
As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,
Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm,
Though round its breast the rolling clouds are
spread,

Eternal sunshine settles on its head.

Beside yon straggling fence that skirts the way,
With blossomed furze unprofitably gay—
There, in his noisy mansion, skilled to rule,
The village master taught his little school.
A man severe he was, and stern to view ;
I knew him well, and every truant knew :
Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace
The day's disasters in his morning face ;
Full well they laughed with counterfeited glee
At all his jokes, for many a joke had he ;
Full well the busy whisper circling round
Conveyed the dismal tidings when he frowned.

AND THEIR POETRY

Yet he was kind, or if severe in aught,
The love he bore to learning was in fault.
The village all declared how much he knew :
'Twas certain he could write, and cipher, too :
Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage,
And even the story ran that he could gauge.
In arguing, too, the parson owned his skill,
For, even though vanquished, he could argue still ;
While words of learned length and thundering
 sound

Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around ;
And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew,
That one small head could carry all he knew.

But past is all his fame, The very spot
Where many a time he triumphed is forgot.
Near yonder thorn that lifts its head on high,
Where once the sign-post caught the passing eye,
Low lies that house where nut-brown draughts
 inspired,

Where gray-beard mirth and smiling toil retired,
Where village statesmen talked with looks profound,
And news much older than their ale went round.

Imagination fondly stoops to trace
The parlour splendours of that festive place :
The white-washed wall, the nicely sanded floor,
The varnished clock that clicked behind the door ;
The chest contrived a double debt to pay,
A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day :
The pictures placed for ornament and use,
The twelve good rules, the royal game of goose ;¹

¹ *Cp.* the description of an author's bedchamber, in "The Citizen of the World," XXX :

"The royal game of goose was there in view.
And the twelve rules the Royal Martyr drew."

The "twelve rules," traditionally ascribed to Charles I, and commonly hung in inns and public-houses, were as follows: (1) Urge no healths. (2) Profane no divine ordinances. (3) Touch no State matters. (4) Reveal

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

The hearth, except when winter chilled the day,
With aspen boughs, and flowers and fennel
gay ;

While broken tea-cups, wisely kept for show,
Ranged o'er the chimney, glistened in a row.

Vain transitory splendours ! could not all
Reprieve the tottering mansion from its fall ?
Obscure it sinks, nor shall it more impart
An hour's importance to the poor man's heart.
Thither no more the peasant shall repair
To sweet oblivion of his daily care ;

No more the farmer's news, the barber's tale,
No more the woodman's ballad shall prevail ;
No more the smith his dusky brow shall clear,
Relax his ponderous strength, and lean to hear ;
The host himself no longer shall be found
Careful to see the mantling bliss go round ;
Nor the coy maid, half willing to be pressed,
Shall kiss the cup to pass it to the rest.

Yes ! let the rich deride, the proud disdain,
These simple blessings of the lowly train,
To me more dear, congenial to my heart,
One native charm, than all the gloss of art :
Spontaneous joys, where nature has its play,
The soul adopts, and owns their first-born sway ;
Lightly they frolic o'er the vacant mind,
Unenvied, unmolested, unconfined.
But the long pomp, the midnight masquerade,
With all the freaks of wanton wealth arrayed—
In these, ere triflers half their wish obtain,
The toiling pleasure sickens into pain ;

no secrets. (5) Pick no quarrels. (6) Make no comparisons. (7) Maintain no ill opinions. (8) Keep no bad company. (9) Encourage no vice. (10) Make no long meals. (11) Repeat no grievances. (12) Lay no wagers. Goose was a game of chance played with counters on a card divided into numbered compartments.

AND THEIR POETRY

And, even while fashion's brightest arts decoy,
The heart distrusting asks if this be joy.

¹ Ye friends to truth, ye statesmen who survey
The rich man's joys increase, the poor's decay,
'Tis yours to judge how wide the limits stand
Between a splendid and a happy land.

Proud swells the tide with loads of freighted ore,
And shouting folly hails them from her shore ;
Hoards even beyond the miser's wish abound,
And rich men flock from all the world around.

Yet count our gains. This wealth is but a name
That leaves our useful products still the same.
Not so the loss. (The man of wealth and pride
Takes up a space that many poor supplied ;
Space for his lake, his park's extended bounds,
Space for his horses, equipage, and hounds :
The robe that wraps his limbs in silken sloth
Has robbed the neighbouring fields of half their
growth ;)

His seat where solitary sports are seen,
Indignant spurns the cottage from the green ;
Around the world each needful product flies,
For all the luxuries the world supplies ;
While thus the land adorned for pleasure all
In barren splendour feebly waits the fall.

As some fair female unadorned and plain,

¹ Goldsmith's "own experience, the suffering for which his heart had always bled, the misery his scanty purse was always ready to relieve, are in his contrast of the pleasures of the great, with innocence and health too often murdered to obtain them. It was this sympathy with the very poor, strongly underlying the most part of all he wrote, though seldom appearing on the surface in any formal political opinion, which seems to have struck his more observing critics as the master-peculiarity in his modes and tendencies of thinking ; and hence it may have been that the impression of him, formed in the girlhood of the daughter of his attached friend, Lord Clare [see *post*, p. 148, note 1], often repeated in her advanced age to her son, Lord Nugent, and by him communicated to me, was 'that he was a strong republican in principle, and would have been a very dangerous writer if he had lived in the times of the French Revolution.'" (Forster, Book IV, chap. vii.)

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

Secure to please while youth confirms her reign,
Slight every borrowed charm that dress supplies,
Nor shares with art the triumph of her eyes ;
But when those charms are past, for charms are
frail,

When time advances, and when lovers fail,
She then shines forth, solicitous to bless,
In all the glaring impotence of dress,
Thus fares the land by luxury betrayed :
In Nature's simplest charms at first arrayed,
But verging to decline, its splendours rise,
Its vistas strike, its palaces surprise ;
While, scourged by famine from the smiling land
The mournful peasant leads his humble band,
And while he sinks, without one arm to save,
The country blooms—a garden and a grave.

Where then, ah! where, shall poverty reside,
To 'scape the pressure of contiguous pride ?
If to some common's fenceless limits strayed
He drives his flock to pick the scanty blade,
Those fenceless fields the sons of wealth divide,
And even the bare-worn common is denied.

If to the city sped—what waits him there ?
To see profusion that he must not share ;
To see ten thousand baneful arts combined
To pamper luxury and thin mankind ;
To see those joys the sons of pleasure know,
Extorted from his fellow-creature's woe.
Here while the courtier glitters in brocade,
There the pale artist plies the sickly trade ;
Here while the proud their long-drawn pomps
display,
There the black gibbet glooms beside the way.
The dome where pleasure holds her midnight
reign,

AND THEIR POETRY

Here, richly decked, admits the gorgeous train;
Tumultuous grandeur crowds the blazing square,
The rattling chariots clash, the torches glare—
Sure scenes like these no troubles e'er annoy!
Sure these denote one universal joy!
Are these thy serious thoughts?—Ah, turn thine
eyes

Where the poor houseless shivering female lies.
She once, perhaps, in village plenty blessed,
Has wept at tales of innocence distressed;
Her modest looks the cottage might adorn,
Sweet as the primrose peeps beneath the thorn;
Now lost to all; her friends, her virtue fled,
Near her betrayer's door she lays her head,
And, pinched with cold, and shrinking from the
shower,

With heavy heart deplores that luckless hour,
When idly first, ambitious of the town,
She left her wheel and robes of country brown.

Do thine, sweet Auburn,—thine, the loveliest
train,

Do thy fair tribes participate her pain?
Even now, perhaps, by cold and hunger led,
At proud men's doors they ask a little bread!

Ah, no! To distant climes, a dreary scene,
Where half the convex world intrudes between,
Through torrid tracts with fainting steps they
go,

Where wild Altama murmurs to their woe.
Far different there from all that charmed before
The various terrors of that horrid shore;
Those blazing suns that dart a downward ray,
And fiercely shed intolerable day;
Those matted woods where birds forget to sing;
But silent bats in drowsy clusters cling;

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Those poisonous fields with rank luxuriance
crowned,
Where the dark scorpion gathers death around ;
Where at each step the stranger fears to wake
The rattling terrors of the vengeful snake ;
Where crouching tigers wait their hapless prey,¹
And savage men more murderous still than they ;
While oft in whirls the mad tornado flies,
Mingling the ravaged landscape with the skies.
Far different these from every former scene,
The cooling brook, the grassy-vested green,
The breezy covert of the warbling grove
That only sheltered thefts of harmless love.

Good Heaven ! what sorrows gloomed that
parting day,
That called them from their native walks away ;
When the poor exiles, every pleasure past,
Hung round the bowers, and fondly looked their
last,
And took a long farewell, and wished in vain
For seats like these beyond the western main,
And shuddering still to face the distant deep,
Returned and wept, and still returned to weep.
The good old sire the first prepared to go
To new-found worlds, and wept for others' woe ;
But for himself, in conscious virtue brave,
He only wished for worlds beyond the grave.
His lovely daughter, lovelier in her tears,
The fond companion of his helpless years,
Silent went next, neglectful of her charms,
And left a lover's for a father's arms.
With louder complaints the mother spoke her woes,
And blessed the cot where every pleasure rose,

¹ Goldsmith's notions of the fauna of North America were evidently very vague.

AND THEIR POETRY

And kissed her thoughtless babes with many a
tear,

And clasped them close, in sorrow doubly dear,
Whilst her fond husband strove to lend relief
In all the silent manliness of grief.

O luxury ! thou curst by Heaven's decree,
How ill exchanged are things like these for thee !
How do thy potions, with insidious joy,
Diffuse their pleasure only to destroy !
Kingdoms, by thee to sickly greatness grown,
Boast of a florid vigour not their own.

At every draught more large and large they grow,
A bloated mass of rank unwieldy woe ;
Till sapped their strength, and every part unsound,
Down, down they sink, and spread a ruin round.

Even now the devastation is begun,
And half the business of destruction done ;
Even now, methinks, as pondering here I stand,
I see the rural virtues leave the land.
Down where yon anchoring vessel spreads the sail
That idly waiting flaps with every gale,
Downward they move, a melancholy band,
Pass from the shore, and darken all the strand.
Contented toil, and hospitable care,
And kind connubial tenderness, are there ;
And piety, with wishes placed above,
And steady loyalty, and faithful love.
And thou, sweet Poetry, thou loveliest maid,
Still first to fly where sensual joys invade ;
Unfit in these degenerate times of shame
To catch the heart, or strike for honest fame ;
Dear charming nymph, neglected and decried,
My shame in crowds, my solitary pride ;
Thou source of all my bliss, and all my woe,
That found'st me poor at first, and keep'st me so ;

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

Thou guide by which the nobler arts excel,
Thou nurse of every virtue, fare thee well !
Farewell, and O ! where'er thy voice be tried,
On Torno's cliffs, or Pambamarca's side,
Whether where equinoctial fervours glow,
Or winter wraps the polar world in snow,
Still let thy voice, prevailing over time,
Redress the rigours of the inclement clime ;
Aid slighted truth with thy persuasive strain ;
+ Teach erring man to spurn the rage of gain ;
Teach him, that states of native strength possessed,
Though very poor, may still be very blessed ;
That trade's proud empire hastes to swift decay,
As ocean sweeps the laboured mole away ;
While self-dependent power can time defy,
As rocks resist the billows and the sky.¹

VII

THE poetic fame of the two writers whom we are here studying together rests upon very narrow foundations—Johnson's upon a single production, Goldsmith's upon the companion pieces just considered ; and the remainder of their output in verse has little independent value. In the case of Johnson, indeed, it is unnecessary to add to the examples already given. But Goldsmith's minor poetry contains a few things which deserve attention.

We will take first the ballad originally called

¹ The last four lines were contributed by Johnson. See Boswell, p. 174.

AND THEIR POETRY

"Edwin and Angelina," but afterward more commonly known as "The Hermit." This poem was written, it is supposed, as early as 1764, and was privately printed by the Countess of Northumberland, but it was first published in "The Vicar of Wakefield" (in which it is read aloud to the Primrose family by Mr Burchell), probably to help to swell the work to the required "2 volumes, 12mo." It presently became the subject of some controversy on account of the fact that Goldsmith was accused—unjustly, as Percy himself admitted—of having plagiarized it from the latter's "The Friar of Orders Gray," subsequently printed in his "Reliques of Ancient English Poetry." No interest attaches to the dispute, but much to the connexion between the poem and that revival of ballad-literature which, though it did not originate with the "Reliques" (as is sometimes loosely said), was greatly stimulated by that epoch-making work. The growth of an enthusiasm for the old ballads and for popular poetry in general was one of the most potent factors in the disintegration of the Classic tradition in the later eighteenth century, and thus a critic's position in regard to it marked him out at once as belonging either to the failing Augustan or to the rising Romantic school. As we are quite prepared to find, therefore, Johnson's attitude was one of pronounced and uncompromising antagonism. Percy was his intimate friend, and it was to Johnson that he dedicated the "Reliques," hoping thus to enlist his

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

favour in the enterprise. But though the Great Cham accepted the compliment he did not modify his views. What he thought of the old ballads themselves is shown by his crushing judgment upon one of the most famous of them : "In 'Chevy Chase' there is not much of either bombast or affectation, but there is chill and lifeless imbecility. The story cannot possibly be told in a manner that shall make less impression upon the mind."¹ And if he was thus contemptuous of all such "barbarous productions of unpolished ages" (as even Percy himself called them), still more contemptuous was he of the mania for ballad-writing which infected many of the versifiers of his time. Boswell records an occasion on which "the conversation having turned on modern imitations of ancient ballads, and some one having praised their simplicity, he treated them with the ridicule which he always displayed when that subject was mentioned"; while twice, as we know, he discharged his feelings regarding them in the form of clever impromptu burlesque, as thus :

I put my hat upon my head,
And walked into the Strand ;
And there I met another man
With his hat in his hand.²

And again :

¹ "Life of Addison." Cp. his satirical account of a club of antiquaries in "The Rambler," No. 177.

² The particular poem here parodied was Percy's "Hermit of Warkworth," which he damned with faint praise as "pretty enough."

AND THEIR POETRY

The tender infant, meek and mild,
Fell down upon the stone ;
The nurse took up the squealing child,
But still the child squeal'd on.

In the *naïveté* of the old ballads, which modern writers were now attempting, not very happily, to reproduce, Johnson indeed could see nothing but crudeness and absurdity, and to him the growing interest in such things was evidence only of a strange perversity of taste. Goldsmith, on the other hand, despite the hampering influences of his Classical prejudices, felt a certain instinctive sympathy with this kind of poetry. While the "Reliques" were in preparation he and Percy talked much about it, and it was by these discussions that his own experiment in the ballad-type of composition was inspired ; though it is significant of the tyranny of the prevailing fashion that he was very anxious to have it understood that his poem was not to be treated too seriously : "We both," he declared, with reference to Percy and himself, "considered these things as trifles at best."¹ As an experiment "Edwin and Angelina" is not entirely successful, for its manner is a little too sophisticated for its matter ; and, as is the case with all eighteenth-century imitations of the ballad style, its simplicity savours of artifice. But if we place it back in the literature of its time we can recognize that it was at least an effort in the

¹ Letter to the "St James's Chronicle" (June 1767) on the subject of the alleged plagiarism.

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

right direction. The comments with which Mr Burchell prefaces it show that Goldsmith clearly perceived the disastrous effect of the "false taste" for rhetorical ornament in contemporary poetry: "English poetry, like that in the latter empire of Rome, is nothing at present but a combination of luxuriant images, without plot or connection—a string of epithets that improve the sound, without carrying on the sense. But perhaps, madam, while I thus reprehend others, you'll think it just that I should give them an opportunity to retaliate; and, indeed, I have made this remark only to have an opportunity of introducing to the company a ballad which, whatever be its other defects, is, I think, at least free from those I have mentioned." ¹ Then follows the poem.

EDWIN AND ANGELINA

"Turn, gentle Hermit of the dale,
And guide my lonely way,
To where yon taper cheers the vale
With hospitable ray.

"For here forlorn and lost I tread,
With fainting steps and slow,
Where wilds, immeasurably spread,
Seem length'ning as I go."

"Forbear, my son," the hermit cries,
"To tempt the dangerous gloom;
For yonder faithless phantom flies
To lure thee to thy doom.

¹ "The Vicar of Wakefield," chap. viii.

AND THEIR POETRY

“ Here to the houseless child of want
My door is open still ;
And though my portion is but scant,
I give it with good will.

“ Then turn to-night, and freely share
Whate’er my cell bestows ;
My rushy couch and frugal fare,
My blessing and repose.

“ No flocks that range the valley free
To slaughter I condemn ;
Taught by that Power that pities me,
I learn to pity them :

“ But from the mountain’s grassy side
A guiltless feast I bring ;
A scrip with herbs and fruits supplied,
And water from the spring.

“ Then, pilgrim, turn ; thy cares forgo ;
All earth-born cares are wrong :
Man wants but little here below,
Nor wants that little long.”

Soft as the dew from heaven descends,
His gentle accents fell :
The modest stranger lowly bends,
And follows to the cell.

Far in a wilderness obscure
The lonely mansion lay,
A refuge to the neighb’ring poor,
And strangers led astray.

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

No stores beneath its humble thatch
Required a master's care ;
The door just op'ning with a latch,
Received the harmless pair.

And now, when busy crowds retire
To take their evening rest,
The hermit trimm'd his little fire,
And cheer'd his pensive guest :

And spread his vegetable store,
And gaily press'd and smiled ;
And, skill'd in legendary lore,
The ling'ring hours beguil'd.

Around, in sympathetic mirth,
Its tricks the kitten tries,
The cricket chirrups on the hearth,
The crackling faggot flies.

But nothing could a charm impart
To soothe the stranger's woe ;
For grief was heavy at his heart,
And tears began to flow.

His rising cares the hermit spied,
With answ'ring care oppress'd :
" And whence, unhappy youth," he cried,
" The sorrows of thy breast ?

" From better habitations spurn'd,
Reluctant dost thou rove ?
Or grieve for friendship unreturn'd,
Or unregarded love ?

AND THEIR POETRY

“ Alas ! the joys that fortune brings,
Are trifling, and decay ;
And those who prize the trifling things,
More trifling still than they.

“ And what is friendship but a name,
A charm that lulls to sleep ;
A shade that follows wealth or fame,
But leaves the wretch to weep ?

“ And love is still an emptier sound,
The modern fair one’s jest ;
On earth unseen, or only found
To warm the turtle’s nest.

“ For shame, fond youth, thy sorrows hush,
And spurn the sex,” he said ;
But while he spoke, a rising blush
His love-lorn guest betray’d.

Surprised he sees new beauties rise,
Expanding to the view ;
Like colours o’er the morning skies,
As bright, as transient too.

The bashful look, the rising breast,
Alternate spread alarms :
The lovely stranger stands confess’d
A maid in all her charms.

“ And, ah ! forgive a stranger rude—
A wretch forlorn,” she cried ;
“ Whose feet unhallow’d thus intrude
Where heaven and you reside.

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

“ But let a maid thy pity share
Whom love has taught to stray ;
Who seeks repose, but finds despair
Companion of her way.

“ My father liv'd beside the Tyne ;
A wealthy lord was he ;
And all his wealth was marked as mine—
He had but only me.

“ To win me from his tender arms,
Unnumber'd suitors came,
Who praised me for imputed charms,
And felt or feigned a flame.

“ Each hour a mercenary crowd
With richest proffers strove ;
Among the rest young Edwin bow'd,
But never talked of love.

“ In humble, simplest habits clad,
No wealth nor power had he ;
Wisdom and worth were all he had,
But these were all to me.

“ And when, beside me in the dale,
He carol'd lays of love,
His breath lent fragrance to the gale,
And music to the grove.

“ The blossom opening to the day,
The dews of heaven refined,
Could nought of purity display,
To emulate his mind.

AND THEIR POETRY

“ The dew, the blossom on the tree,
With charms inconstant shine ;
Their charms were his, but, woe is me !
Their constancy was mine.

“ For still I tried each fickle art,
Importunate and vain ;
And while his passion touched my heart,
I triumphed in his pain.

“ Till, quite dejected with my scorn,
He left me to my pride,
And sought a solitude forlorn,
In secret, where he died.

“ But mine the sorrow, mine the fault,
And well my life shall pay ;
I'll seek the solitude he sought,
And stretch me where he lay.

“ And there forlorn, despairing, hid,
I'll lay me down and die ;
'Twas so for me that Edwin did,
And so for him will I.”

“ Forbid it, Heaven ! ” the hermit cried,
And clasp'd her to his breast :
The wondering fair one turn'd to chide—
'Twas Edwin's self that prest !

“ Turn, Angelina, ever dear,
My charmer, turn to see
Thy own, thy long-lost Edwin here,
Restored to love and thee.

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

" Thus let me hold thee to my heart,
And ev'ry care resign :

And shall we never, never part,
My life—my all that's mine!

" No, never, from this hour to part,
We'll live and love so true ;
The sigh that rends thy constant heart
Shall break thy Edwin's too."¹

This poem is Goldsmith's only attempt in serious ballad-writing, but he used the ballad measure and style with capital effect in two burlesque elegies. One of these is only a playful parody of the well-meant efforts of elegiac poets to eulogize their subjects, and as such it needs no commentary.

AN ELEGY ON THAT GLORY OF HER SEX, MRS MARY BLAIZE

Good people all, with one accord
Lament for Madam Blaize,
Who never wanted a good word,
From those who spoke her praise.

¹ The text given above is that of Goldsmith's final revision of the poem. Comparison of this with the original version, as printed by the Countess of Northumberland, illustrates, as Forster says, his "habit of elaboration and pains-taking in the correction of his verse." Apart from many minor changes, four stanzas were entirely rewritten and the two concluding stanzas omitted altogether. These last, however, though Goldsmith's critical judgment prompted him to reject them as superfluous, are worthy of preservation on their own account.

" Here amidst sylvan bow'rs we'll rove,
From lawn to woodland stray ;
Blest as the songsters of the grove,
As innocent as they.

" To all that want, and all that wail,
Our pity shall be given,
And when this life of love shall fail,
We'll love again in heav'n."

AND THEIR POETRY

The needy seldom passed her door,
And always found her kind ;
She freely lent to all the poor,—
Who left a pledge behind.

She strove the neighbourhood to please,
With manners wondrous winning ;
And never followed wicked ways,—
Unless when she was sinning.

At church, in silks and satins new,
With hoop of monstrous size,
She never slumbered in her pew,—
But when she shut her eyes.

Her love was sought, I do aver,
By twenty beaux and more ;
The king himself has followed her,—
When she has walked before.

But now her wealth and finery fled,
Her hangers-on cut short all ;
The doctors found, when she was dead,—
Her last disorder mortal.

Let us lament, in sorrow sore ;
For Kent Street well may say,
That had she lived a twelvemonth more,—
She had not died to-day.

The second of the two poems in question is more important because, while this too is in appearance merely a bit of whimsical fooling, its humour is touched by a serious purpose.

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

With his tender and sympathetic nature Goldsmith was of course a lover of animals, and the same fine spirit of humanity that prompted him again and again to lift his voice in behalf of the suffering and the weak among men made him equally indignant against all kinds of cruelty in the treatment of God's humbler creatures.¹ It happened that while he was engaged on "The Citizen of the World" London was seized by one of those "epidemic crazes" to which, as he says, the English people are occasionally subject, and which then took the form of a fear of mad dogs. "On a groundless cry of hydrophobia, dogs were slaughtered wholesale, and their bodies literally blocked the streets. 'The dear, good-natured, honest, sensible creatures!' exclaimed Horace Walpole. 'Christ! How can anybody hurt them?' But what Horace said only to his friend, Goldsmith said to everybody; publicly denouncing the cruelty in a series of witty stories, ridiculing the motives alleged for it, and pleading with eloquent warmth for the honest associate of man."² The barbarity of the whole deplorable business aroused his wrath, but its patent absurdity, as he felt, could best be exposed by satire; and it was in the satiric spirit that he returned to the subject in the following:

¹ From this point of view his "History of Animated Nature" is full of personal interest.

² Forster, Book III, chap. iv; and see "The Citizen of the World," LXIX.

AND THEIR POETRY

ELEGY ON THE DEATH OF A MAD DOG

Good people all, of every sort,
Give ear unto my song,
And if you find it wond'rous short,—
It cannot hold you long.

In Islington there was a man,
Of whom the world might say,
That still a godly race he ran,—
Whene'er he went to pray.

A kind and gentle heart he had,
To comfort friends and foes :
The naked every day he clad,—
When he put on his clothes.

And in that town a dog was found,
As many dogs there be,
Both mongrel, puppy, whelp, and hound,
And curs of low degree.

This dog and man at first were friends ;
But when a pique began,
The dog, to gain some private ends,
Went mad, and bit the man.

Around from all the neighb'ring streets
The wond'ring neighbours ran,
And swore the dog had lost his wits,
To bite so good a man.

The wound it seem'd both sore and sad
To every Christian eye ;
And while they swore the dog was mad,
They swore the man would die.

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

But soon a wonder came to light,
That show'd the rogues they lied :
The man recovered of the bite—
The dog it was that died.

These mock-elegies, though clever and amusing, must of course be taken only at their proper value, as examples of Goldsmith's lighter vein. For his richest humour in verse we have to turn to two other occasional pieces which, though they belong to the closing years of his life, may be conveniently introduced here. The first of these, which dates from 1771, and was written not for publication (it did not, in fact, appear in print till after his death), but simply for the eye of the friend to whom it was addressed, may be left to explain itself.

THE HAUNCH OF VENISON

A POETICAL EPISTLE TO LORD CLARE¹

Thanks, my lord, for your venison, for finer or
fatter
Never ranged in a forest or smoked in a platter ;
The haunch was a picture for painters to study,
The fat was so white and the lean was so ruddy ;
Though my stomach was sharp, I could scarce
help regretting
To spoil such a delicate picture by eating ;
I had thoughts in my chamber to place it in view,
To be shown to my friends as a piece of vertu ;

¹ Robert Nugent, "the younger son of an old and wealthy Westmeath family," was "a jovial Irishman and a man of wit." (Forster, Book III, chap. xi.) He was raised to the peerage as Baron Nugent and Viscount Clare in 1767.

AND THEIR POETRY

As in some Irish houses, where things are so so,
One gammon of bacon hangs up for a show :
But, for eating a rasher of what they take
pride in,

They'd as soon think of eating the pan it is fried
in.

But hold—let me pause—don't I hear you pronounce

This tale of the bacon a damnable bounce ?

Well, suppose it a bounce—sure a poet may try,
By a bounce now and then, to get courage to fly.

But, my lord, it's no bounce : I protest in my
turn

It's a truth—and your lordship may ask Mr Byrne.
To go on with my tale : as I gazed on the haunch,
I thought of a friend that was trusty and staunch ;
So I cut it, and sent it to Reynolds undrest,
To paint it, or eat it, just as he liked best.

Of the neck and the breast I had next to dispose ;
'Twas a neck and a breast that might rival
Monroe's :

But in parting with these I was puzzled again,
With the how, and the who, and the where, and
the when.

There's Howard, and Coley, and H—rth, and Hiff,
I think they love venison—I know they love
beef.

There's my countryman Higgins—oh ! let him
alone,

For making a blunder, or picking a bone.

But hang it !—to poets who seldom can eat

Your very good mutton's a very good treat ;

Such dainties to them their health it might hurt,

It's like sending them ruffles, when wanting a
shirt.

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

While thus I debated, in reverie centred,
An acquaintance, a friend as he called himself,
entered ;

An under-bred, fine-spoken fellow was he,
And he smiled as he looked at the venison and me.
“ What have we got here ?—Why this is good
eating !

Your own I suppose—or is it in waiting ? ”

“ Why, whose should it be ? ” cried I with a
flounce ;

“ I get these things often ”—but that was a
bounce :

“ Some lords, my acquaintance, that settle the
nation,

Are pleased to be kind—but I hate ostentation.”

“ If that is the case then,” cried he, very gay,

“ I’m glad I have taken this house in my way.

To-morrow you take a poor dinner with me ;

No words—I insist on’t—precisely at three ;

We’ll have Johnson, and Burke ; all the wits will
be there ;

My acquaintance is slight, or I’d ask my Lord
Clare.

And now that I think on’t, as I am a sinner !

We wanted this venison to make out the dinner.

What say you—a pasty ? It shall, and it must,

And my wife, little Kitty, is famous for crust.

Here, porter ! this venison with me to Mile-End ;

No stirring—I beg—my dear friend—my dear
friend ! ”

Thus, snatching his hat, he brushed off like the
wind,

And the porter and eatables followed behind.

Left alone to reflect, having emptied my shelf,

And “ nobody with me at sea but myself ” ;

AND THEIR POETRY

Though I could not help thinking my gentleman
hasty,

Yet Johnson, and Burke, and a good venison pasty,
Were things that I never disliked in my life,
Though clogged with a coxcomb, and Kitty his
wife.

So next day, in due splendour to make my
approach,

I drove to the door in my own hackney-coach.

When come to the place where we all were to
dine

(A chair-lumbered closet just twelve feet by nine),
My friend bade me welcome, but struck me quite
dumb

With tidings that Johnson and Burke would not
come :

“ For I knew it,” he cried : “ both eternally fail ;
The one with his speeches, and t’other with Thrale.
But no matter, I’ll warrant we’ll make up the
party

With two full as clever, and ten times as hearty.
The one is a Scotchman, the other a Jew ;
They’re both of them merry, and authors like you ;
The one writes the Snarler, the other the Scourge ;
Some thinks he writes Cinna—he owns to
Panurge.”

While thus he described them by trade and by
name,

They entered, and dinner was served as they
came.

At the top a fried liver and bacon was seen ;
At the bottom was tripe, in a swinging tureen ;
At the sides there was spinach and pudding made
hot ;

In the middle a place where the pasty—was not.

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

Now, my lord, as for tripe, it's my utter aversion,
And your bacon I hate like a Turk or a Persian ;
So there I sat stuck, like a horse in a pound,
While the bacon and liver went merrily round :
But what vex'd me most was that d—d Scottish
rogue,

With his long-winded speeches, his smiles, and his
brogue,

And, " Madam," quoth he, " may this bit be my
poison,

A prettier dinner I never set eyes on ;

Pray a slice of your liver, though may I be
curst,

But I've eat of your tripe till I'm ready to
burst."

" The tripe ! " quoth the Jew, with his chocolate
cheek ;

" I could dine on this tripe seven days in a
week :

I like these here dinners so pretty and small ;

But your friend there, the doctor, eats nothing at
all."

" Oh ! oh ! " quoth my friend, " he'll come on in a
trice ;

He's keeping a corner for something that's
nice :

There's pasty "—" A pasty ! " repeated the
Jew ;

" I don't care if I keep a corner for't too."

" What the de'il, mon, a pasty ! " re-echoed the
Scot ;

" Though I'm splitting, I'll still keep a corner for
that."

" We'll all keep a corner," the lady cried out ;

" We'll all keep a corner," was echoed about.

AND THEIR POETRY

While thus we resolved, and the pasty delayed,
With looks that quite petrified, entered the maid :
A visage so sad, and so pale with affright,
Waked Priam in drawing his curtains by night.
But we quickly found out—for who could mistake
her ?—

That she came with some terrible news from the
baker :

And so it fell out, for that negligent sloven
Had shut out the pasty on shutting his oven.
Sad Philomel thus—but let similes drop—
And now that I think on't, the story may stop.

To be plain, my good lord, it's but labour mis-
placed,

To send such good verses to one of your taste ;
You've got an odd something—a kind of
discerning,

A relish, a taste—sickened over with learning ;
At least, it's your temper, as very well known,
That you think very slightly of all that's your
own :

So perhaps, in your habits of thinking amiss,
You may make a mistake, and think slightly of
this.

From this delightful “farce in miniature,”
as Dowden happily calls it, we pass to what
the same critic characterizes as “the most
mischievous, and the most playful, the friendli-
est and the faithfullest of satires,” “Retalia-
tion.” The occasion of this poem has been
described by various writers who must have
been familiar with all the circumstances,
among them Cumberland and Garrick, but
their accounts differ in detail and we must,

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therefore, be satisfied with a general statement. It would appear, then, that one evening in the last year of Goldsmith's life, his eccentricities having now "so visibly increased" as to become more than ever before the "common themes" of wit among his associates, a number of these at one of their dinners at the St James's Coffee House agreed during his absence to write a series of humorous epitaphs upon him. Of these impromptu effusions one only has survived—the oft-quoted couplet of Garrick :

Here lies Nolly Goldsmith, for shortness call'd
Noll,
Who wrote like an angel but talk'd like poor
Poll.

Whether he was afterward invited to retaliate upon them (as one narrator states) or did so upon his own initiative is uncertain ; but in any event his own poem, which thus owes the title it later came to bear to its origin, was the result. The poem was never completed, nor was it published during his lifetime, but it was soon handed about in manuscript and secured for him a veritable triumph in his own select circle. For by his fine strokes of humorous characterization, the shrewdness of his satire, and, withal, his unfailing good temper, he effectively turned the tables upon those who had laughed at him, and proved himself a master in the dangerous game of compliments to which he had been challenged.

AND THEIR POETRY

RETALIATION: A POEM

Of old, when Scarron ¹ his companions invited,
Each guest brought his dish, and the feast was
united ;

If our landlord supplies us with beef and with fish,
Let each guest bring himself, and he brings the
best dish.

Our Dean ² shall be venison, just fresh from the
plains ;

Our Burke ³ shall be tongue with the garnish of
brains ;

Our Will ⁴ shall be wild fowl, of excellent flavour,
And Dick ⁵ with his pepper shall heighten the
savour ;

Our Cumberland's ⁶ sweet-bread its place shall
obtain,

And Douglas ⁷ is pudding, substantial and plain ;

Our Garrick's a salad, for in him we see

Oil, vinegar, sugar and saltiness agree ;

To make out the dinner, full certain I am,

That Ridge ⁸ is anchovy, and Reynolds is lamb,

That Hickey's ⁹ a capon, and, by the same rule,

¹ Paul Scarron (1610-60), French dramatist, novelist, and humorist. Though a deformed cripple and a great sufferer he was a man of jovial temper and a lover of practical jokes.

² Dr Barnard, Dean of Derry, whom Goldsmith had known at the University of Dublin.

³ Edmund Burke.

⁴ William Burke, a relative of Edmund.

⁵ Richard Burke, a barrister, a younger brother of Edmund.

⁶ Richard Cumberland (1732-1811), dramatist, novelist, and essayist. His comedies belong to that sentimental kind which Goldsmith greatly disliked (see his essay on "Sentimental Comedy") and against which his own two plays were a protest. Hence the point of his criticism of Cumberland's work later in the poem.

⁷ Dr Douglas, then Canon of Windsor. We meet him in Boswell as Bishop of Salisbury.

⁸ John Ridge, of the Irish Bar.

⁹ An Irish attorney "whose habit of somewhat coarse raillery was apt to be indulged too freely at Goldsmith's expense." (Forster, Book IV, chap. viii.)

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Magnanimous Goldsmith a gooseberry fool.
At a dinner so various, at such a repast,
Who'd not be a glutton, and stick to the last ?
Here, waiter, more wine ! let me sit while I'm able,
Till all my companions sink under the table :
Then, with chaos and blunders encircling my head,
Let me ponder, and tell what I think of the
dead.

Here lies our good Dean, re-united to earth,
Who mixed reason with pleasure, and wisdom with
mirth :

If he had any faults, he has left us in doubt ;
At least, in six weeks I could not find 'em out ;
Yet some have declared, and it can't be denied 'em,
That sly-boots was cursedly cunning to hide 'em.

Here lies our good Edmund, whose genius was
such,

We scarcely can praise it or blame it too much ;
Who, born for the universe, narrowed his mind,
And to party gave up what was meant for man-
kind ;

Though fraught with all learning, yet straining
his throat

To persuade Tommy Townshend ¹ to lend him his
vote ;

Who, too deep for his hearers, still went on
refining,

And thought of convincing, while they thought of
dining ; ²

Though equal to all things, for all things unfit ;
Too nice for a statesman, too proud for a wit,
For a patriot too cool, for a drudge disobedient,
And too fond of the *right* to pursue the *expedient*.

¹ Thomas Townshend, Whig M.P. for Whitchurch.

² Great as were Burke's powers as an orator, his speeches often emptied the benches of the House.

AND THEIR POETRY

In short, 'twas his fate, unemployed or in place,
sir,

To eat mutton cold, and cut blocks with a razor.

Here lies honest William, whose heart was a
mint,

While the owner ne'er knew half the good that
was in't ;

The pupil of impulse it forced him along,

His conduct all right, with his argument wrong ;

Still aiming at honour, yet fearing to roam,

The coachman was tipsy, the chariot drove home ;

Would you ask for his merits ?—alas ! he had
none ;

What was good was spontaneous, his faults were
his own.

Here lies honest Richard, whose fate I must
sigh at ;

Alas, that such frolic should now be no quiet !

What spirits were his ! what wit and what whim !

Now breaking a jest, and now breaking a limb ;

Now wrangling and grumbling to keep up the ball,

Now teasing and vexing, yet laughing at all !

In short, so provoking a devil was Dick,

That we wished him full ten times a day at Old
Nick ;

But, missing his mirth and agreeable vein,

As often we wished to have Dick back again.

Here Cumberland lies, having acted his parts,

The Terence of England, the mender of hearts ;

A flattering painter, who made it his care

To draw men as they ought to be, not as they are.

His gallants were all faultless, his women divine,

And comedy wonders at being so fine ;

Like a tragedy-queen he had dized her out,

Or rather like tragedy having a rout.

JOHNSON & GOLDSMITH

His fools have their follies so lost in a crowd
Of virtues and feelings, that folly grows proud ;
And coxcombs, alike in their failings alone,
Adopting his portraits, are pleased with their
own.

Say, where has our poet this malady caught ?
Or wherefore his characters thus without fault ?
Say, was it that vainly directing his view
To find out men's virtues, and finding them
few,

Quite sick of pursuing each troublesome elf,
He grew lazy at last, and drew from himself ?

Here Douglas retires from his toils to relax,
The scourge of impostors, the terror of quacks ;
Come, all ye quack bards, and ye quacking
divines,

Come and dance on the spot where your tyrant
reclines :

When satire and censure encircled his throne,
I feared for your safety, I feared for my own ;
But now he is gone, and we want a detector,
Our Dodds¹ shall be pious, our Kenricks² shall
lecture ;

Macpherson³ write bombast, and call it a style,
Our Townshend make speeches, and I shall com-
pile ;

¹ The Rev. William Dodd, still remembered for his " Beauties of Shakespeare " (1752). He was hanged in 1777 for having forged the fifth Lord Chesterfield's name to a bond.

² Dr William Kenrick, miscellaneous writer, and a bitter enemy both of Goldsmith and of Johnson. The reference is to his lectures " at the Devil and other taverns, on every conceivable subject, from Shakespeare to perpetual motion, which he thought he had discovered." (Forster, Book IV, chap. iii.)

³ James Macpherson (1736-96), whose ' translations ' of Ossian had made him one of the most prominent figures in the literary world of the time. These, like his then just-published version of the " Iliad," were in a loosely rhythmical prose. (See *ante*, p. 87 ; and for his controversy with Johnson, see Boswell, pp. 282-284, 287, 288.)

AND THEIR POETRY

New Lauders ¹ and Bowers ² the Tweed shall cross
over,

No countryman living their tricks to discover ;
Detection her taper shall quench to a spark,
And Scotchman meet Scotchman, and cheat in the
dark.

Here lies David Garrick, describe me who can ;
An abridgment of all that was pleasant in man.
As an actor, confessed without rival to shine ;
As a wit, if not first, in the very first line :
Yet, with talents like these, and an excellent heart,
The man had his failings, a dupe to his art.
Like an ill-judging beauty, his colours he spread,
And beplastered with rouge his own natural red.
On the stage he was natural, simple, affecting ;
'Twas only that, when he was off, he was acting.
With no reason on earth to go out of his way,
He turned and he varied full ten times a day :
Though secure of our hearts, yet confoundedly
sick

If they were not his own by finessing and trick :
He cast off his friends, as a huntsman his pack,
For he knew when he pleased he could whistle
them back.

Of praise a mere glutton, he swallowed what
came ;

And the puff of a dunce, he mistook for it fame ;
Till his relish grown callous, almost to disease ;
Who peppered the highest, was surest to please.
But let us be candid, and speak out our mind :
If dunces applauded, he paid them in kind.

¹ William Lauder, a Scotch schoolmaster, who had made himself notorious by his attempt, supported by fabricated evidence, to prove that Milton had been guilty of wholesale plagiarism from various modern Latin poets. His fraud was exposed by Dr Douglas.

² Archibald Bower, another insignificant Scotch writer of bad faith, who was also pilloried by Douglas.

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Ye Kenricks, ye Kellys,¹ and Woodfalls² so grave,
What a commerce was yours, while you got and
you gave !

How did Grub-street re-echo the shouts that you
raised,

While he was be-Rosciused, and you were be-
praised.

But peace to his spirit, wherever it flies,
To act as an angel and mix with the skies :

Those poets who owe their best fame to his skill
Shall still be his flatterers, go where he will ;
Old Shakespeare receive him with praise and with
love,

And Beaumonts and Bens be his Kellys above.

Here Hickey reclines, a most blunt, pleasant
creature,

And slander itself must allow him good nature ;
He cherished his friend, and he relished a bumper ;
Yet one fault he had, and that one was a thumper.
Perhaps you may ask if the man was a miser :

I answer, No, no ; for he always was wiser.

Too courteous, perhaps, or obligingly flat ?

His very worst foe can't accuse him of that.

Perhaps he confided in men as they go,

And so was too foolishly honest ? Ah no !

Then what was his failing ? come tell it, and burn
ye.

He was—could he help it?—a special attorney.

Here Reynolds is laid, and, to tell you my mind,
He has not left a wiser or better behind.

His pencil was striking, resistless, and grand ;

His manners were gentle, complying, and bland ;

¹ Hugh Kelly, a successful writer of sentimental comedies. Garrick gave him his first lift into fame by producing his "False Delicacy," and Johnson later provided a prologue to another of his plays, "A Word to the Wise."

² William Woodfall, the printer of "The Morning Chronicle."

AND THEIR POETRY

Still born to improve us in every part,
His pencil our faces, his manners our heart.
To coxcombs averse, yet more civilly steering ;
When they judged without skill, he was still hard
of hearing ;
When they talk'd of their Raphaels, Correggios,
and stuff,
He shifted his trumpet,¹ and only took snuff.

VIII

THE main purpose of this little book, as an introduction to the poetry of Johnson and Goldsmith, has now been achieved. Only the biographical part of our study remains to be completed.

Though in the six years between "The Traveller" and "The Deserted Village" Goldsmith had gained an assured position as poet, essayist, dramatist, and novelist, and though in 1770 he received a mark of recognition by his appointment as Professor of Ancient History in the just established Royal Academy (a position which unfortunately had no salary attached to it),² the course of his life was still unchanged ; it was to the end a life of drudgery,

¹ A chill contracted in early manhood, while he was studying in Rome, had left the great painter permanently deaf and he was obliged to use an ear-trumpet.

² In January 1770 he wrote to his brother Maurice of the honour which had thus been conferred upon him, adding : " Honours to one in my situation are something like ruffles to a man that wants a shirt." It will have been seen that he afterward used this same comparison in "The Haunch of Venison," and he had already employed it in one of his essays. The habit of repeating details was very characteristic of him. Thus, for example, Carolina Wilhelmina Amelia is the name both of Beau Tibbs' daughter in "The Citizen of the World" (LV) and of the fashionable Miss Skeggs in "The Vicar of Wakefield" (chap. xi).

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struggle, financial anxieties, disappointment, and depression. That his improvident habits, his fatally sanguine temper, and his boundless generosity had much to do with his troubles is very clear; in practical matters he was a mere child; his heart was easily touched, his purse—even when nearly empty—was always open; and in his dealings with the many objects of his charity, he, like his own good Parson, “quite forgot their vices in their woe.” His thoughtlessness was apparent to all his friends. “He had raised money and squandered it,” wrote Johnson, when the poor fellow had passed beyond the reach of reproach, “by every artifice of acquisition and folly of expense.”¹ “I have heard Sir Joshua remark of him,” the great painter’s pupil and biographer records, that “in times of his greatest distress, he was often obliged to supplicate a friend for a loan of ten pounds for his immediate relief; yet if by accident a distressed petitioner told him a piteous tale, nay, if a subscription for any folly was proposed to him, he, without any thought of his own poverty, would, with an air of generosity, freely bestow on the person who solicited for it the very loan he had himself just before obtained.”²

Personal vanity and a strange taste for finery, which went oddly with the slovenliness which Johnson had once condemned, were also among the causes of his ever-accumulating

¹ Letter to Bennet Langton, in Boswell, p. 277.

² Northcote’s “Life of Reynolds,” vol. i, p. 288.

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debts; he was fond of exhibiting himself in Temple Gardens in his bloom-coloured coat and silk breeches; and long bills from his tailor, Mr Filby (whose unpaid account against him stood at £79 14s. at his death), were the result. It is possible, as Washington Irving surmised, that the extravagance of his wardrobe at this time was not altogether unconnected with his intimacy with a family named Horneck, whom he accompanied on a visit to Paris in 1770, and especially with his affection for the younger Miss Horneck—Mary—whom he prettily called “the Jessamy Bride.”¹ This, however, is hypothetical. Setting sentimental conjectures aside, we must content ourselves with the plain statement that Goldsmith’s spendthrift habits were largely responsible for the troubles by which his closing years were clouded.

No other way presenting itself out of his difficulties, therefore, he continued to mortgage his brain to the booksellers, often receiving payment in advance for work not completed or even hardly begun; as in the case of his “Animated Nature,” for which he was paid 500 guineas on account when the contract was made, the whole of that sum being expended before half a dozen chapters were written. Amid his miscellaneous labours of compilation, however, he added one more to

¹ Forster is doubtless right in thinking that Irving wove far too much romance out of this episode; but he admits that Mary “exerted strange fascination over Goldsmith.” At the request of the two sisters, his coffin was opened, just before interment, that a lock might be cut from his hair, and this was in the possession of Mary (then Mrs Gwyn) when she died nearly seventy years later.

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the short list of his original works in the admirable comedy "She Stoops to Conquer," produced at Covent Garden on March 15, 1773. With this he scored a great success. But by this time the failure of his health began to be evident to his friends. He had long suffered from an internal disease, which had been aggravated through neglect. An acute attack of this prostrated him early in 1774. It yielded to treatment, but was followed by a low fever of nervous origin. Unfortunately, instead of accepting the advice of his doctor, he attempted to cure himself with a then popular nostrum called James's Powder, which had given him relief before, and in which, like Horace Walpole, he had implicit confidence. His obstinate persistence in the use of this undoubtedly hastened the end. His last recorded words are singularly pathetic; when Dr Turton said to him, "Your pulse is in greater disorder than it should be, from the degree of fever which you have; is your mind at ease?" he replied that it was not.¹ On Sunday, April 3rd, his illness seemed suddenly to take a favourable turn; but early the following morning he was seized with convulsions, and in a few hours he was dead.

The effect of his death upon his friends attested the warmth of their feelings toward him. "When Burke was told he burst into tears. Reynolds was in his painting-room

¹ Boswell, p. 416.

AND THEIR POETRY

when the messenger went to him, but at once he laid his pencil aside, which in times of great family distress he had not been known to do, left his painting-room, and did not re-enter it that day. Northcote describes the blow as the 'severest Sir Joshua ever received.' Nor was the day less gloomy for Johnson. 'Poor Goldsmith is gone,' was his anticipation of the evil tidings. . . . He spoke of the loss for years, as with the tenderness of a recent grief; and in his little room hung round with portraits of his favourite friends . . . Goldsmith had a place of honour." It is recorded, too, that the staircase of his chambers in Brick Court was filled with a motley crowd of mourners—"women without a home . . . with no friend but him they had come to weep for; outcasts of that great, solitary, wicked city, to whom he had never forgotten to be kind and charitable."¹

On April 9th his body was laid to rest in the burial ground of the Temple Church. At Reynolds' instigation a monument, consisting of a medallion portrait and tablet, was later placed in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey. The inscription was written in Latin by Johnson, and contains the admirable phrase which well sums up the versatility of Goldsmith's talent and the peculiar charm of his style—"qui nullum fere scribendi genus non tetigit, nullum quod tetigit non ornavit"—"who left scarcely any kind of writing

¹ Forster, Book IV, chap. xxi.

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untouched, and touched nothing that he did not adorn." ¹

It would be easy to draw up a formidable list of Goldsmith's failings. He was improvident, capricious, and vain; often childishly petulant; shiftless and over-sanguine; wanting in judgment and in self-control. But his weaknesses were the weaknesses only of a radically Bohemian nature, and who would now wish to sit in judgment upon him? To him indeed the much-abused phrase may be said strictly to apply—he was nobody's enemy but his own. And if there was much in his character of which the moralist certainly cannot approve, there was much in it too which even the severest moralist must find singularly engaging, for he was generous, tender-hearted, sympathetic, and he had always a tear for pity and a hand open as day for melting charity. When one considers the broad humanity and the pure and noble spirit of his work, one does not wonder that all his faults are forgotten, and that, as Thackeray says, he keeps his place among the best-beloved of English writers.

¹ Johnson's determination to write this epitaph in Latin was the occasion of a famous 'round robin' protest (see Boswell, p. 385), the signatories to which very properly urged that "the memory of so eminent an English writer ought to be perpetuated in the language to which his works are likely to be so lasting an ornament." But Johnson clung obstinately to the absurd notion (not yet dead in academic circles) that there is something peculiarly sacred about the Latin tongue, and refused to yield.

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IX

WHEN his friendship with Goldsmith began, Johnson, then a man of fifty-two, had already emerged victorious from his long struggle with outrageous fortune. The remaining twenty-three years of his life, though they did not bring him complete happiness—for ill-health and melancholia prevented that—were years of independence, security, and ease. They were years too in which he was privileged to reap the honourable reward of his past labours. In 1765 Trinity College, Dublin, conferred upon him the degree of LL.D. ; his own university followed, in 1775, with a D.C.L., designed to mark its high appreciation of what he had done “to the advancement of literature and the benefit of the community.” Though he never himself assumed the title of Doctor, to which he had thus a double right, he was naturally pleased by these academic distinctions. But in his own view they were less important than his “private conversation” in February 1767 with the King, “which gratified his monarchical enthusiasm, and which he loved to relate, with all its circumstances, when requested by his friends.” From the very full account of the interview in the pages of Boswell it does not appear that his Majesty said anything very remarkable. But Johnson, who firmly believed in the divinity that “doth hedge a king”—even when the

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king happened to be George III—was much impressed. “I find,” he declared, “it does a man good to be talked to by his sovereign.”

It is of Johnson in this last period that our knowledge is so full and rich, for Boswell had now come upon the scene, and in his wonderful record we can follow his hero into all the details of his life. Liberated by his pension from the compulsion of the daily task, he now gave himself more and more to the pleasures of talk and the distractions of society, and these he sought not only in the inner circle of his intimates, but also in many wealthy homes, the hostesses of which welcomed the great man notwithstanding his oddities of behaviour and the frequent brusqueness of his manners. Of special interest among his new friends were a Mr Thrale, a very rich brewer, and his clever and well-read wife, whom Boswell (who did not like her) describes as “a lady of lively talents, improved by education.” The Thrales had a beautiful home in Streatham, and there for many years Johnson was a regular guest; there his bedroom was kept in readiness for him, and a tidy wig (his own being generally singed by too close contact with the candle in reading); and there he always found the kind of hospitality which most delighted him—agreeable and varied company and excellent dinners. This pleasant intercourse lasted till Mr Thrale’s death in 1781, after which, according to Boswell, Mrs Thrale’s affection for “the Colossus of Literature” began to wane.

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Boswell suspects the rise of another attachment. Be this as it may, a few months before Johnson's death, and greatly to his disgust, she married an Italian music-master named Piozzi.

Meanwhile, though his life was centred in London, which he regarded as the only place in the world really worth living in, Johnson from time to time travelled a good deal—to various parts of England, to Wales, and once with the Thrales to France. The most important of these expeditions was that recorded in his "Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland."¹ This was made in 1773, under persuasion of the tireless Boswell, who met him in Edinburgh and conducted him across the Highland border to Skye, Raasay, Coll, Mull, Inchkenneth, and Icolmkill. Considering all the circumstances this was a really heroic undertaking, for Johnson, it must be remembered, was now sixty-four, and the ninety-four days he spent in Scotland, often in very rough travel, were, as Boswell testifies, days of "vigorous exertion." Prejudiced as he was against all things Scottish,² he none the less saw much that appealed to him in the feudal manners of the remote districts visited. But if Boswell had reason so far to be pleased, he

¹ This should be read in conjunction with Boswell's narrative of the same expedition in his "Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides."

² Note the delightfully humorous touch (which reminds us that Johnson knew how to make fun of himself) in the account of Montrose: "At our inn we did not find a reception such as we thought proportionate to the commercial opulence of the place; but Mr Boswell desired me to observe that the innkeeper was an Englishman, and then I defended him as well as I could."

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had less ground for satisfaction in his hero's sojourn under the paternal roof at Auchinleck. The elder Boswell was a stout Whig and Presbyterian, and he and Johnson got to loggerheads over Cromwell. "The controversy between Tory and Covenanter raged with great fury, and ended in Johnson's pressing upon the old judge the question, what Cromwell . . . had ever done for his country; when, after being much tortured, Lord Auchinleck at last spoke out: 'God! Doctor, he gart kings ken that they had a lith in their neck'—he taught kings that they had a joint in their neck." We are indebted for this incident to the table-talk of Scott,¹ for Boswell is discreetly silent about it. But he admits his chagrin that his wife took a dislike to Johnson, of whom she had heard much, but whom she now met for the first time. "She thought," he says, "he had too much influence over her husband," and adds a remark which she once made "with more point than justice" on his (Boswell's) hero-worship: "I have seen many a bear led by a man, but I never before saw a man led by a bear."

Johnson's travels were, however, only occasional interruptions to his customary routine. What that was can best perhaps be suggested by a quotation from the reminiscences of the Rev. Dr Maxwell, who was for some time assistant preacher at the Temple, and then knew Johnson well:

¹ See Lockhart's "Life of Scott," chap. xxi.

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His general mode of life, during my acquaintance, seemed to be pretty uniform. About twelve o'clock I commonly visited him, and frequently found him in bed, or declaiming over his tea, which he drank very plentifully.¹ He generally had a levee of morning visitors, chiefly men of letters: Hawkesworth, Goldsmith, Murphy, Langton, Steevens, Beauclerk, etc., etc., and sometimes learned ladies. . . . He seemed to me to be considered as a kind of public oracle, whom everybody thought they had a right to visit; and doubtless they were all well rewarded. . . . He declaimed all the morning, then went to dinner at a tavern, where he commonly stayed late, and then drank his tea at some friend's house, over which he loitered a great while, but seldom took supper. . . . I can scarcely recollect that he ever refused going with me to a tavern, and he often went to Ranelagh, which he deemed a place of innocent recreation.²

Such a mode of life may seem amazing, but it has its pathetic aspect, for we know that Johnson was driven to adopt it by his persistent dread of solitude and the torment of his own melancholy thoughts. We do not wonder, however, that Maxwell "could never discover how he found time for his compositions," and was obliged to suppose that he did his writing and reading entirely by night. His literary work was now, indeed, very irregular, for, no

¹ His fondness for tea amounted to a passion. Boswell tells us that he drank it in enormous quantities and "at all hours." He once described himself as "a hardened and shameless tea-drinker." Probably the habit had grown upon him through his entire abstinence for many years from alcohol.

² Boswell, p. 215.

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longer pricked by necessity, he allowed his natural indolence to get the better of him—greatly to his distress, as we learn from his many references to the subject in his prayers and meditations. Yet he was still capable of spasms of energy, and the quantity of his production during this period is not inconsiderable. Much of this, like his numerous fugitive articles on miscellaneous subjects and his political pamphlets, have no interest for us now. But two substantial undertakings stand to his credit: his edition of Shakespeare (1765) and his “Lives of the Poets” (1779-81), originally written as a series of biographical and critical prefaces to a collection of the English poets, but afterward published separately.

The completion of this large task brings us nearly to the close of Johnson's life. The physical ailments against which he had long bravely struggled naturally increased in intensity and seriousness with the advancing years, and as one by one his old friends passed away the gloom gathered more and more thickly about his mind. Courageous he had always been in every kind of danger and suffering, but there was one thing, as Boswell tells us, before which he recoiled with a horror which he never sought to conceal, and that was the thought of death. Here, unhappily, for reasons already assigned, his strong religious faith afforded him but little help; indeed, it was the haunting dread of the “something after death” which made him willing to bear

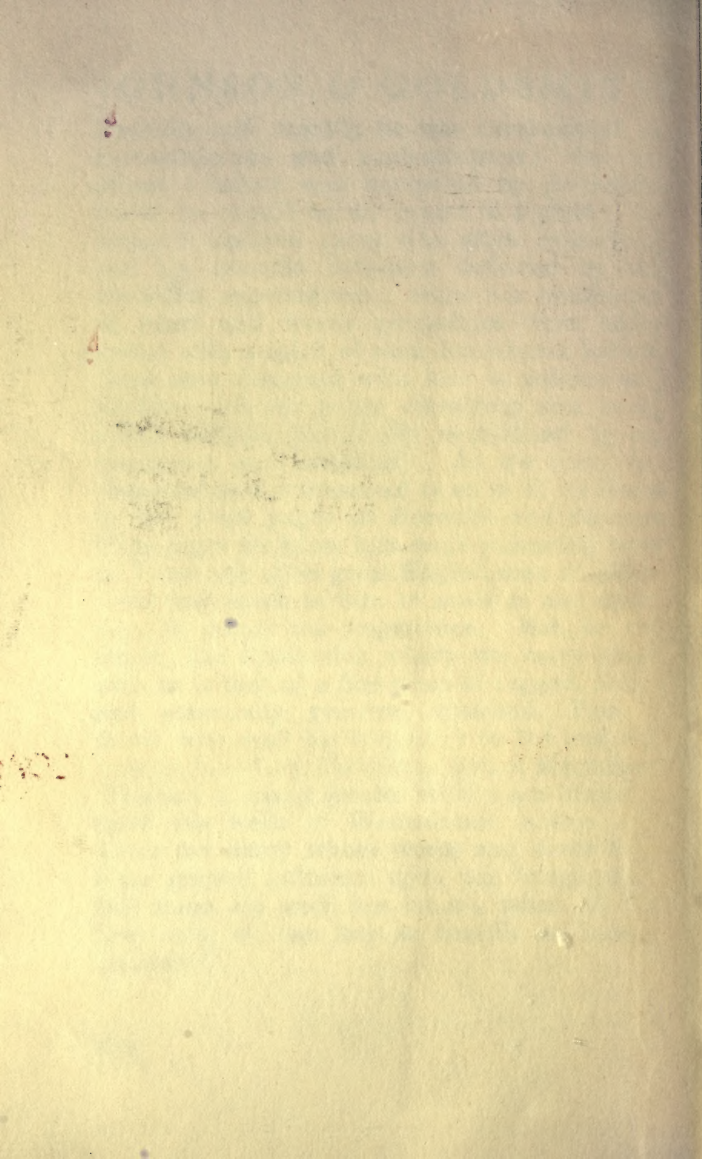
AND THEIR POETRY

the ills he had rather than fly to others that he knew not of. But, as he once reminded Boswell, a man knows that he has to die and "it will do him no good to whine," and as he drew nearer and nearer to the inevitable his own attitude toward it was one rather of stoical acceptance than of Christian hope. In 1783 his health began definitely to break up, and in the June of that year he had a stroke of paralysis which deprived him for a time of his power of speech. Recovering, he made an attempt to get back to his old social life, and even went so far as to found a small dining club "to insure himself society in the evening of three days in the week." But in the winter dropsy set in, and though next summer he was strong enough to pay a round of visits to Oxford, in Staffordshire and Derbyshire, and finally to his native Lichfield, when he returned to London in the autumn he quite realized that it was to die. Those of his old friends who were left—in particular, Burke, Bennet Langton, and Reynolds—were faithful at his bedside; their sympathy was a great consolation to him; and at the last his mind was perfectly calm. He died peacefully on December 13, 1784, and a week later was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Even the foregoing brief sketch will have served to indicate some of those peculiarities which have combined to make Johnson's personality so interesting a study, especially to those who, like himself, care particularly for the biographical aspects of literature.


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Mentally and morally he was compounded of inconsistencies and contradictions; for his robust intellect was hampered by prejudices which we should hardly expect in a child; his massive common sense was often overridden and his splendid judgment deflected by the absurdest superstitions; while his tenderness of heart and warm sympathies were oddly united with a spirit of rank intolerance toward those who disagreed with him in politics and religion, and his really chivalrous and benevolent feelings continually neutralized by his coarseness and irritability. As we study his character as it is presented to us in all its facets in the vivid pages of Boswell—and through these pages we know him more intimately than we know any other great English man of letters—we find much in him to smile at and much even to arouse our impatience. But, on the whole, the impression which we carry away with us is that of a fine piece of rugged, noble, and essentially genuine manhood. Few, I think, who read his biography to the end will hesitate to endorse the declaration of Macaulay: “Names of many greater writers are inscribed upon the walls of Westminster Abbey. . . . There are many whose words and deeds have a far greater influence upon our imagination. But there are very few whom, when all has been said, we can love so heartily as Samuel Johnson.”



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